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MATERIALS AND METHODS OF FICTION

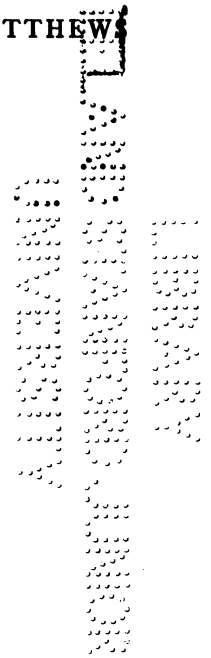
MATERIALS AND METHODS OF FICTION

BY

CLAYTON HAMILTON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

BRANDER MATTHEWS



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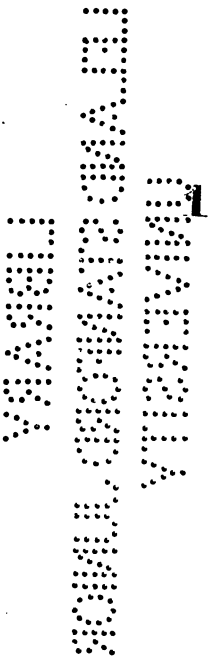

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TO

FREDERIC TABER COOPER

WITH ADMIRATION FOR THE CRITIC

WITH AFFECTION FOR THE FRIEND

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INTRODUCTION

I

In our time, in these early years of the twentieth century, the novel is the prosperous parvenu of literature, and only a few of those who acknowledge its vogue and who laud its success take the trouble to recall its humble beginnings and the miseries of its youth. But like other parvenus it is still a little uncertain of its position in the society in which it moves. It is a newcomer in the literary world; and it has the self-assertiveness and the touchiness natural to the situation. It brags of its descent, although its origins are obscure. It has won its way to the front and it has forced its admission into circles where it was formerly denied access. It likes to forget that it was once but little better than an outcast, unworthy of recognition from those in authority. Perhaps it is still uneasily conscious that not a few of those who were born to good society may look at it with cold suspicion as though it was still on sufferance.

Story-telling has always been popular, of course; and the desire is deep-rooted in all of us to hear and to tell some new thing and to tell again something deserving remembrance. But the novel itself, and the short-story also, must confess that they have only of late been able to claim equality with the epic and the lyric, and with comedy and tragedy, literary forms consecrated by antiquity. There were nine muses in Greece of old, and

no one of these daughters of Apollo was expected to inspire the writer of prose-fiction. Whoever had then a story to tell, which he wished to treat artistically, never dreamed of expressing it except in the nobler medium of verse, in the epic, in the idyl, in the drama. Prose seemed to the Greeks, and even to the Latins who followed in their footsteps, as fit only for pedestrian purposes. Even oratory and history were almost rhythmic; and mere prose was too humble an instrument for those whom the Muses cherished. The Alexandrian vignettes of the gentle Theocritus may be regarded as anticipations of the modern short-story of urban local color; but this delicate idyllist used verse for the talk of his Tanagra figurines.

Even when the modern languages entered into the inheritance of Latin and Greek, verse held to its ancestral privileges, and the brief tale took the form of the ballad, and the longer narrative called itself a *chanson de geste*. Boccaccio and Rabelais and Cervantes might win immediate popularity and invite a host of imitators; but it was long after their time before a tale in prose, whether short or long, achieved recognition as worthy of serious critical consideration. In his study of Balzac, Brunetière recorded the significant fact that no novelist, who was purely and simply a novelist, was elected to the French Academy in the first two centuries of its existence. And the same acute critic, in his "History of Classical French Literature," pointed out that French novels were under a cloud of suspicion even so far back as the days of Erasmus, in 1525. It was many scores of years thereafter before the self-appointed guardians of French literature esteemed the novel highly enough to condescend to discuss it.

Perhaps this was not altogether a disadvantage. French tragedy was discussed only too abundantly; and the theorists laid down rules for it, which were not a little cramping. Another French critic, M. Le Breton, in his account of the growth of French prose-fiction in the first half of the nineteenth century, has asserted that this exemption from criticism really redounded to the benefit of the novel, since the despised form was allowed to develop naturally, spontaneously, free from all the many artificial restrictions which the dogmatists succeeded in imposing on tragedy and on comedy, and which resulted at last in the sterility of the French drama toward the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. While this advantage is undeniable, one may question whether it was not bought at too great a price and whether there would not have been a certain profit for prose-fiction if its practitioners had been kept up to the mark by a criticism which educated the public to demand greater care in structure, more logic in the conduct of events, and stricter veracity in the treatment of characters.

However much it might then be deemed unworthy of serious consideration, the novel in the eighteenth century began to attract to itself more and more authors of rich natural endowment. In English literature especially, prose-fiction tempted men as unlike as Defoe and Swift, Richardson and Fielding, Smollett and Sterne, Goldsmith and Johnson. And a little earlier the eighteenth century essayists, with Steele and Addison at the head of them, had developed the art of character-delineation, a development out of which the novelists were to make their profit. The influence of the English eighteenth-century essay on the growth of prose-fiction, not only in the British Isles,

but also on the continent of Europe, is larger than is generally admitted. Indeed, there is a sense in which the successive papers depicting the character and the deeds of Sir Roger de Coverley may be accepted as the earliest of serial stories.

But it was only in the nineteenth century that the novel reached its full expansion and succeeded in winning recognition as the heir of the epic and the rival of the drama. This victory was the direct result of the overwhelming success of the Waverley novels and of the countless stories written more or less in accordance with Scott's formula, by Cooper, by Victor Hugo and Dumas, by Manzoni, and by all the others who followed in their footsteps in every modern language. Not only born story-tellers but writers who were by natural gift poets or dramatists, seized upon the novel as a form in which they could express themselves freely and by which they might hope to gain a proper reward in money as well as in fame. The economic interpretation of literary history has not received the attention it deserves; and the future investigator will find a rich field in his researches for the causes of the expansion of the novel in the nineteenth century simultaneous with the decline of the drama in the literature of almost every modern language except French.

As the nineteenth century drew towards its maturity, the influence of Balzac reinforced the influence of Scott; and realism began to assert its right to substitute itself for romance. The adjustment of character to its appropriate background, the closer connection of fiction with the actual facts of life, the focusing of attention on the normal and the usual rather than on the abnormal and the exceptional, — all these steps in advance were more

easily taken in the freer form of the novel than they could be in the more restricted formula of the drama; and for the first time in its history prose-fiction found itself a pioneer, achieving a solidity of texture which the theater had not yet been able to attain.

The novel revealed itself at last as a fit instrument for applied psychology, for the use of those delicate artists who are interested rather in what character is than in what it may chance to do. In the earliest fictions, whether in prose or verse, the hero had been merely a type, little more than a lay-figure capable of violent attitudes, a doer of deeds who, as Professor Gummere has explained, "answered the desire for poetic expression at a time when an individual is merged in the clan." And as the realistic writers perfected their art, the more acute readers began to perceive that the hero who is a doer of deeds can represent only the earlier stages of culture which we have long outgrown. This hero came to be recognized as an anachronism, out of place in a more modern social organization based on a full appreciation of individuality. He was too much a type and too little an individual to satisfy the demands of those who looked to literature as the mirror of life itself and who had taught themselves to relish what Lowell terms the "punctilious veracity which gives to a portrait its whole worth."

Thus it was only in the middle years of the nineteenth century, after Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert, after Thackeray and George Eliot, and Hawthorne, that the novel found out its true field. And yet it was in the middle years of the seventeenth century that the ideal to which it was aspiring had been proclaimed frankly by the forgotten Furetière in the preface to his "Roman Bourgeois." Furetière lacked the skill and the insight

needful for the satisfactory attainment of the standard he set up, — indeed, the attainment of that standard is beyond the power of most novelists even now. But Furetière's declaration of the principles which he proposed to follow is as significant now as it was in 1666, when neither the writer himself nor the reader to whom he had to appeal were ripe for the advance which he insisted upon. "I shall tell you," said Furetière, "sincerely and faithfully, several stories or adventures which happened to persons who are neither heroes nor heroines, who will raise no armies and overthrow no kingdoms, but who will be honest folk of mediocre condition, and who will quietly make their way. Some of them will be good-looking and others ugly. Some of them will be wise and others foolish; and these last, in fact, seem likely to prove the larger number."

II

The novel had a long road to travel before it became possible for novelists to approach the ideal that Furetière proclaimed and before they had acquired the skill needed to make their readers accept it. And there had also to be a slow development of our own ideas concerning the relation of art to life. For one thing, art had been expected to emphasize a moral; there was even a demand on the drama to be overtly didactic. Less than a score of years after Furetière's preface, there was published an English translation of the Abbé d'Aubignac's "Pratique du Théâtre" which was entitled the "Whole Art of the Stage" and in which the theory of "poetic justice" was set forth formally. "One of the chiefest, and indeed the most indispensable Rule of Drammatick Poems is that in them Virtues always ought to be rewarded, or at least

commended, in spight of all the Injuries of Fortune; and that likewise Vices be always punished or at least detested with Horrour, though they triumph upon the Stage for that time."

Doctor Johnson was so completely a man of his own century that he found fault with Shakspere because Shakspere did not preach, because in the great tragedies virtue is not always rewarded and vice is not always punished. Doctor Johnson and the Abbé d'Aubignac wanted the dramatist to be false to life as we all know it. Beyond all peradventure the wages of sin is death; and yet we have all seen the evil-doer dying in the midst of his devoted family and surrounded by all the external evidences of worldly success. To insist that virtue shall be outwardly triumphant at the end of a play or of a novel is to require the dramatist or the novelist to falsify. It is to introduce an element of unreality into fiction. It is to require the story-teller and the playmaker to prove a thesis that common sense must reject.

Any attempt to require the artist to prove anything is necessarily cramping. A true representation of life does not prove one thing only, it proves many things. Life is large, unlimited, and incessant; and the lessons of the finest art are those of life itself; they are not single but multiple. Who can declare what is the single moral contained in the "Oedipus" of Sophocles, the "Hamlet" of Shakspere, the "Tartufe" of Molière? No two spectators of these masterpieces would agree on the special morals to be isolated; and yet none of them would deny that the masterpieces are profoundly moral because of their essential truth. Morality, a specific moral, — this is what the artist cannot deliberately put into his work, without destroying its veracity. But morality is also

what he cannot leave out if he has striven only to handle his subject sincerely. Hegel is right when he tells us that art has its moral, — but the moral depends on him who draws it. The didactic drama and the novel-with-a-purpose are necessarily unartistic and unavoidably unsatisfactory.

This is what the greater artists have always felt; this is what they have often expressed unhesitatingly. Corneille, for one, although he was a man of his time, a creature of the seventeenth century, had the courage to assert that "the utility of a play is seen in the simple depicting of vices and virtues, which never fails to be effective if it is well done and if the traits are so recognizable that they cannot be confounded or mistaken; virtue always gets itself loved, however unfortunate, and vice gets itself hated, even though triumphant." Dryden, again, a contemporary of d'Aubignac and a predecessor of Johnson, had a clearer vision than either of them; and his views are far in advance of theirs. "Delight," he said, "is the chief if not the only end of poesy," and by poesy he meant fiction in all its forms; "instruction can be admitted but in the second place, for poetry only instructs as it delights." And once more, when we pass from the seventeenth century of Corneille and Dryden to the nineteenth century when the novel has asserted its rivalry with the drama, we find the wise Goethe declaring to Eckermann the doctrine which is now winning acceptance everywhere. "If there is a moral in the subject it will appear, and the poet has nothing to consider but the effective and artistic treatment of his subject; if he has as high a soul as Sophocles, his influence will always be moral, let him do what he will."

A high soul is not given to all writers of fiction, and

yet there is an obligation on them all to aspire to the praise bestowed on Sophocles as one who "saw life steadily and saw it whole." Even the humblest of story-tellers ought to feel himself bound, not to preach, not to point a moral ostentatiously, not to warp the march of events for the sake of so-called "poetic justice," but to report life as he knows it, making it neither better nor worse, to represent it honestly, to tell the truth about it and nothing but the truth, even if he does not tell the whole truth — which is given to no man to know. This is an obligation that not a few of the foremost writers of fiction have failed to respect. Dickens, for example, is delighted to reform a character in the twinkling of an eye, transforming a bad man into a good man over night, and contradicting all that we know about the permanence of character.

Other novelists have asked us to admire violent and unexpected acts of startling self-sacrifice, when a character is made to take on himself the responsibility for the delinquency of some other character. They have invited our approbation for a moral suicide, which is quite as blameworthy as any physical suicide. With his keen insight into ethics and with his robust common sense, Huxley stated the principle which these novelists have failed to grasp. A man, he tells us, "may refuse to commit another, but he ought not to allow himself to be believed worse than he actually is," since this results in "a loss to the world of moral force which cannot be afforded." The final test of the fineness of fiction lies in its veracity. "Romance is the poetry of circumstance," as Stevenson tells us, and "drama is the poetry of conduct"; we may be tolerant and easy-going in our acceptance of a novelist's circumstances, but we ought to be rigorous as

regards conduct. As far as the successive happenings of his story are concerned, the mere incidents, the author may on occasion ask our indulgence and tax our credulity a little; but he must not expect us to forgive him for any violation of the fundamental truths of human nature.

It is this stern veracity, unflinching and inexorable, which makes "Anna Karénina" one of the noblest works of art that the nineteenth century devised to the twentieth, just as it is the absence of this fidelity to the facts of life, the twisting of character to prove a thesis, which vitiates the "Kreutzer Sonata," and makes it unworthy of the great artist in fiction who wrote the earlier work. It is not too much to say that the development of Tolstoi as a militant moralist is coincident with his decline as an artist. He is no longer content to picture life as he sees it; he insists on preaching. And when he uses his art, not as an end in itself, but as an instrument to advocate his own individual theories, although his great gifts are not taken from him, the result is that his later novels lack the broad and deep moral effect which gave his earlier studies of life and character their abiding value.

Stevenson had in him "something of the shorter catechist"; and the Scotch artist in letters, enamored of words as he was, seized firmly the indispensable law. "The most influential books, and the truest in their influence, are works of fiction," he declared. "They do not pin their reader to a dogma, which he must afterward discover to be inexact; they do not teach a lesson, which he must afterward unlearn. They repeat, they rearrange, they clarify the lessons of life; they disengage us from ourselves, they constrain us to the acquaintances of others, and they show us the web of experience not as we can see it for ourselves, but with a singular change — that mon-

strous, consuming ego of ours being, for the nonce, struck out. To be so, they must be reasonably true to the human comedy; and any work that is so serves the turn of instruction." This is well thought and well put, although many of us might demand that novels should be more than "reasonably true." But even if Stevenson was here a little lax in the requirements he imposed on others, he was stricter with himself when he wrote "Markheim" and the "Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

Another story-teller, also cut off before he had displayed the best that was in him, set up the same standards for his fellow-craftsmen in fiction. In his striking discussion of the responsibility of the novelist, Frank Norris asserted that the readers of fiction have "a right to the Truth as they have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is *not* right that they be exploited and deceived with false views of life, false characters, false sentiment, false morality, false history, false philosophy, false emotions, false heroism, false notions of self-sacrifice, false views of religion, of duty, of conduct, and of manners."

III

Even if there may have been a certain advantage to the novel, as M. Le Breton maintains, because it was long left alone unfettered by any critical code, to expand as best it could, to find its own way unaided and to work out its own salvation, the time has now come when it may profit by a criticism which shall force it to consider its responsibilities and to appraise its technical resources, if it is to claim artistic equality with the drama and the epic. It has won its way to the front; and there are few

who now question its right to the position it has attained. There is no denying that in English literature, in the age of Victoria, the novel established itself as the literary form most alluring to all men of letters and that it succeeded to the place held by the essay in the days of Anne and by the play in the days of Elizabeth.

And like the play and the essay in those earlier times, the novel now attracts writers who have no great natural gift for the form. Just as Peele and Greene wrote plays because play-writing was popular and advantageous, in spite of their inadequate dramaturgic equipment, and just as Johnson wrote essays because essay-writing was popular and advantageous in spite of his deficiency in the ease and lightness which the essay demands, so Brougham and Motley and Froude adventured themselves in fiction. We may even doubt whether George Eliot was a born story-teller and whether she would not have been more successful in some other epoch when some other literary form than the novel had happened to be in fashion. In France the novel tempted Victor Hugo, who was essentially a lyric poet, and the elder Dumas, who was essentially a playwright. There are not lacking signs of late that the drama is likely in the immediate future to assert a sharper rivalry with prose-fiction; and novelists like Mr. Barrie and M. Hervieu have relinquished the easier narrative for the more difficult and more dangerous stage-play. But there is no evidence that the novel is soon to lose its vogue. It has come to stay; and as the nineteenth century left it to the twentieth so the twentieth will probably bequeath it to the twenty-first unimpaired in prosperity.

Perhaps the best evidence of the solidity of its position is to be found in the critical consideration which it is at

last receiving. Histories of fiction in all literatures and biographies of the novelists in all languages are multiplying abundantly. We are beginning to take our fiction seriously and to inquire into its principles. Long ago Freytag's "Technic of the Drama" was followed by Spielhagen's "Technic of the Novel," rather Teutonically philosophic, both of them, and already a little out of date. Studies of prose-fiction are getting themselves written, none of them more illuminative than Professor Bliss Perry's. The novelists themselves are writing about the art of fiction, as Sir Walter Besant did, and they are asking what the novel is, as Mr. Marion Crawford has done. They are beginning to resent the assertion of the loyal adherents of the drama, that the novel is too loose a form to call forth the best efforts of the artist, and that a play demands at least technical skill whereas a novel may be often the product of unskilled labor.

Questions of all kinds are presenting themselves for discussion. Has the rise of realism made romance impossible? Is there a valid distinction between romance and romanticism? Is the short-story a definite form, differing from the novel in purpose as well as in length? What is the best way to tell a story, — in the third person, as in the epic, — in the first person, as in an autobiography, — or in letters? Which is of most importance, character or incident or atmosphere? Is the novel-with-a-purpose legitimate? Why is it that dramatized novels often fail in the theater? Ought a novelist to take sides with his characters and against them, or ought he to suppress his own opinions and remain impassive, as the dramatist must? Does a prodigality in the invention of incidents reveal a greater imagination in the novelist than is required for the *sincere* depicting of simple characters in

every-day life? Why has the old trick of inserting brief tales inside a long novel — such as we find in "Don Quixote" and "Tom Jones" and the "Pickwick Papers" — been abandoned of late years? How far is a novelist justified in taking his characters so closely from actual life that they are recognizable by his readers? What are the advantages and disadvantages of local color? How much dialect may a novelist venture to employ? Is the historical novel really a loftier type of fiction than the novel of contemporary life? Is it really possible to write a veracious novel about any other than the novelist's native land? Why is it that so many of the greater writers of fiction have brought forth their first novel only after they had attained to half the allotted threescore years and ten? Is the scientific spirit going to be helpful or harmful to the writer of fiction? Which is the finer form for fiction, a swift and direct telling of the story, with the concentration of a Greek tragedy, such as we find in the "Scarlet Letter" and in "Smoke," or an ampler and more leisurely movement more like that of the Elizabethan plays, such as we may see in "Vanity Fair" and in "War and Peace"?

These questions, and many another, we may expect to hear discussed, even if they cannot all of them be answered, in any consideration of the materials and the methods of fiction. And the result of these inquiries cannot fail to be beneficial, both to the writer of fiction and to the reader of fiction. To the story-teller himself they will serve as a stimulus and a guide, calling attention to the technic of his craft and broadening his knowledge of the principles of his art. To the idle reader even they ought to be helpful, because they will force him to think about the novels he may read and because they

will lead him to be more exacting, to insist more on veracity in the portrayal of life and to demand more care in the method of presentation. Every art profits by a wider understanding of its principles, of its possibilities and of its limitations, as well as by a more diffused knowledge of its technic.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS OF FICTION

CHAPTER I

THE PURPOSE OF FICTION

BEFORE we set out upon a study of the materials and methods of fiction, we must be certain that we appreciate the purpose of the art and understand its relation to the other arts and sciences. The purpose of fiction is to embody certain truths of human life in a series of imagined facts. The importance of this purpose is scarcely ever appreciated by the casual careless reader of the novels of a season. Although it is commonly believed that such a reader overestimates the weight of works of fiction, the opposite is true — he underestimates it. Every novelist of genuine importance seeks not merely to divert but also to instruct — to instruct, not abstractly, like the essayist, but concretely, by presenting to the reader characters and actions which are true. For the best fiction, although it deals with the lives of imaginary people, is no less true than the best history and biography, which record actual facts of human life; and it is more true than such careless reports of actual occurrences as are published in the daily newspapers. The truth of worthy fiction is evidenced by the honor in which it has been held in all ages among all races. "You can't fool all the people all the time"; and if the drama and the epic and the novel were not true, the human race would have rejected them many centuries ago. Fiction has survived, and flourishes to-day, because it is a means of telling truth.

It is only in the vocabulary of very careless thinkers that the words *truth* and *fiction* are regarded as antithetic. A genuine antithesis subsists between the words *fact* and *fiction;* but *fact* and *truth* are not synonymous. The novelist forsakes the realm of fact in order that he may better tell the truth, and lures the reader away from actualities in order to present him with realities. It is of prime importance, in our present study, therefore, that we should understand at the very outset the relation between fact and truth, the distinction between the actual and the real.

A fact is a specific manifestation of a general law: this general law is the truth because of which that fact has come to be. It is a fact that when an apple-tree is shaken by the wind, such apples as may be loosened from their twigs fall to the ground: it is a truth that bodies in space attract each other with a force that varies inversely as the square of the distance between them. Fact is concrete, and is a matter of physical experience: truth is abstract, and is a matter of mental theory. Actuality is the realm of fact, reality the realm of truth. The universe as we apprehend it with our senses is actual; the laws of the universe as we comprehend them with our understanding are real.

All human science is an endeavor to discover the truths which underlie the facts that we perceive: all human philosophy is an endeavor to understand and to appraise those truths when once they are discovered: and all human art is an endeavor to utter them clearly and effectively when once they are appraised and understood. The history of man is the history of a constant and continuous seeking for the truth. Amazed before a universe of facts, *he has striven* earnestly to discover the truth which under-

lies them, — striven heroically to understand the large reality of which the actual is but a sensuously perceptible embodiment. In the earliest centuries of recorded thought the search was unmethodical; truth was apprehended, if at all, by intuition, and announced as dogma: but in modern centuries certain regular methods have been devised to guide the search. The modern scientist begins his work by collecting a large number of apparently related facts and arranging them in an orderly manner. He then proceeds to induce from the observation of these facts an apprehension of the general law that explains their relation. This hypothesis is then tested in the light of further facts, until it seems so incontestable that the minds of men accept it as the truth. The scientist then formulates it in an abstract theoretic statement, and thus concludes his work.

But it is at just this point that the philosopher begins. Accepting many truths from many scientists, the philosopher compares, reconciles, and correlates them, and thus builds out of them a structure of belief. But this structure of belief remains abstract and theoretic in the mind of the philosopher. It is now the artist's turn. Accepting the correlated theoretic truths which the scientist and the philosopher have given him, he endows them with an imaginative embodiment perceptible to the senses. He translates them back into concrete terms; he clothes them in invented facts; he makes them imaginatively perceptible to a mind native and indued to actuality; and thus he gives expression to the truth.

This triple process of the scientific discovery, the philosophic understanding, and the artistic expression of truth has been explained at length, because every great writer of fiction must pass through the entire mental

process. The fiction-writer differs from other seekers for the truth, not in the method of his thought, but merely in its subject-matter. His theme is human life. It is some truth of human life that he endeavors to discover, to understand, and to announce; and in order to complete his work, he must apply to human life an attention of thought which is successively scientific, philosophic, and artistic. He must first observe carefully certain facts of actual life, study them in the light of extended experience, and induce from them the general laws which he deems to be the truths which underlie them. In doing this, he is a scientist. Next, if he be a great thinker, he will correlate these truths and build out of them a structure of belief. In doing this, he is a philosopher. Lastly, he must create imaginatively such scenes and characters as will illustrate the truths he has discovered and considered, and will convey them clearly and effectively to the minds of his readers. In doing this, he is an artist.

But although this triple mental process (of scientific discovery, philosophic understanding, and artistic expression) is experienced in full by every master of fiction, we find that certain authors are interested most in the first, or scientific phase of the process, others in the second, or philosophic phase, and still others in the third, or artistic phase. Evidently Emile Zola is interested chiefly in a scientific investigation of the actual facts of life, George Eliot in a philosophic contemplation of its underlying truths, and Gabriele D'Annunzio in an artistic presentation of the dream-world that he imagines. Washington Irving is mainly an artist, Tolstoi mainly a philosopher, and Jane Austen mainly a scientifically accurate observer. Few are the writers, even among the *greatest masters of* the art, of whom we feel, as we feel of

Hawthorne, that the scientist, the philosopher, and the artist reign over equal precincts of their minds. Hawthorne the scientist is so thorough, so accurate, and so precise in his investigations of provincial life that no less a critic than James Russell Lowell declared the "House of the Seven Gables" to be "the most valuable contribution to New England history that has yet been made." Hawthorne the philosopher is so wise in his understanding of crime and retribution, so firm in his structure of belief concerning moral truth, that it seems that he, if any one, might give an answer to that poignant cry of a despairing murderer, —

> "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
> And with some sweet oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart?"[1]

And Hawthorne the artist is so delicate in his sensitive and loving presentation of the beautiful, so masterly both in structure and in style, that his work, in artistry alone, is its own excuse for being. Were it not for the *confinement* of his fiction — its lack of range and sweep, both in subject-matter and in attitude of mind, — his work on this account might be regarded as an illustration of all that may be great in the threefold process of creation.

Fiction, to borrow a figure from chemical science, is life distilled. In the author's mind, the actual is first evaporated to the real, and the real is then condensed to the imagined. The author first transmutes the concrete actualities of life into abstract realities; and then he transmutes these abstract realities into concrete imaginings. Necessarily, if he has pursued this mental process without

[1] *Macbeth*: Act V; Scene 3.

a fallacy, his imaginings will be true; because they represent realities, which in turn have been induced from actualities.

In one of his criticisms of the greatest modern dramatist, Mr. William Archer has called attention to the fact that "habitually and instinctively men pay to Ibsen the compliment (so often paid to Shakespeare) of discussing certain of his female characters as though they were real women, living lives apart from the poet's creative intelligence." [It is evident that Mr. Archer, in saying "real women," means what is more precisely denoted by the words "actual women."] Such a compliment is also paid instinctively to every master of the art of fiction; and the reason is not hard to understand. If the general laws of life which the novelist has thought out be true laws, and if his imaginative embodiment of them be at all points thoroughly consistent, his characters will be true men and women in the highest sense. They will not be actual, but they will be real. The great characters of fiction — Sir Willoughby Patterne, Tito Melema, D'Artagnan, Père Grandet, Rosalind, Tartufe, Hamlet, Ulysses — embody truths of human life that have been arrived at only after thorough observation of facts and patient induction from them. Cervantes must have observed a multitude of dreamers before he learned the truth of the idealist's character which he has expressed in Don Quixote. The great people of fiction are typical of large classes of mankind. They live more truly than do you and I, because they are made of us and of many men beside. They have the large reality of general ideas, which is a truer thing than the actuality of facts. This is why we know them and think of them as real *people — old* acquaintances whom we knew (perhaps)

before we were born, when (as is conceivable) we lived with them in Plato's Realm of Ideas. In France, instead of calling a man a miser, they call him an Harpagon. We know Rosalind as we know our sweetest summer love; Hamlet is our elder brother, and understands our own wavering and faltering.

Instinctively also we regard the great people of fiction as more real than many of the actual people of a bygone age whose deeds are chronicled in dusty histories. To a modern mind, if you conjure with the name of Marcus Brutus, you will start the spirit of Shakespeare's fictitious patriot, not of the actual Brutus, of a very different nature, whose doings are dimly reported by the chroniclers of Rome. The Richelieu of Dumas père may bear but slight resemblance to the actual founder of the French Academy; but he lives for us more really than the Richelieu of many histories. We know Hamlet even better than we know Henri-Frédéric Amiel, who in many ways was like him; even though Amiel has reported himself more thoroughly than almost any other actual man. We may go a step further and declare that the actual people of any age can live in the memory of after ages only when the facts of their characters and their careers have been transmuted into a sort of fiction by the minds of creative historians. Actually, in 1815, there was but one Napoleon; now there are as many Napoleons as there are biographies and histories of him. He has been recreated in one way by one author, in another by another; and you may take your choice. You may accept the Julius Cæsar of Mr. Bernard Shaw, or the Julius Cæsar of Thomas De Quincey. The first is frankly fiction; and the second, not so frankly, is fiction also, — just as far from actuality as Shakespeare's adaptation of Plutarch's portraiture.

One of the most vivid illustrations of how a great creative mind, honestly seeking to discover, to understand, and to express the truth concerning actual characters of the past, necessarily makes fiction of those characters, is given by Thomas Carlyle in his "Heroes and Hero-Worship." Here, in Carlyle's method of procedure, it is easy to discern that threefold process of creation which is undergone by the fiction-making mind. An examination of recorded facts concerning Mohammed, Dante, Luther, or Burns leads him to a discovery and a formulation of certain abstract truths concerning the Hero as Prophet, as Poet, as Priest, or as Man of Letters; and thereafter, in composing his historical studies, he sets forth only such actual facts as conform with his philosophic understanding of the truth and will therefore represent this understanding with the utmost emphasis. He makes fiction of his heroes, in order most emphatically to tell the truth about them.

In this way biography and history at their best are doomed to employ the methods of the art of fiction; and we can therefore understand without surprise why the average reader always says of the histories of Francis Parkman that they read like novels, even though the most German-minded scientists of history assure us that Parkman is always faithful to his facts. Facts, to the mind of this model of historians, were indicative of truths; and those truths he endeavored to express with faultless art. Like the best of novelists, he was at once a scientist, a philosopher, and an artist; and this is not the least of reasons why his histories will endure. They are as true as fiction.

Not only do the great characters of fiction convince us of reality: in the mere events themselves of worthy fiction

we feel a fitness that makes us know them real. Sentimental Tommy really did lose that literary competition because he wasted a full hour searching vainly for the one right word; Hetty Sorrel really killed her child; and Mr. Henry must have won that midnight duel with the Master of Ballantrae, though the latter was the better swordsman. These incidents conform to truths we recognize. And not only in the fiction that clings close to actuality do we feel a sense of truth. We feel it just as keenly in fairy tales like those of Hans Christian Andersen, or in the worthiest wonder-legends of an earlier age. We are told of The Steadfast Tin Soldier that, after he was melted in the fire, the maid who took away the ashes next morning found him in the shape of a small tin heart; and remembering the spangly little ballet-dancer who fluttered to him like a sylph and was burned up in the fire with him, we feel a fitness in this little fancy which opens vistas upon human truth. Mr. Kipling's fable of "How the Elephant Got His Trunk" is just as true as his reports of Mrs. Hauksbee. His theory may not conform with the actual facts of zoological science; but at any rate it represents a truth which is perhaps more important for those who have become again like little children.

Just as we feel by instinct the reality of fiction at its best, so also with a kindred instinct equally keen we feel the falsity of fiction when the author lapses from the truth. Unless his characters act and think at all points consistently with the laws of their imagined existence, and unless these laws are in harmony with the laws of actual life, no amount of sophistication on the part of the anthor can make us finally believe his story; and unless we believe his story, his purpose in writing it will have

failed. The novelist, who has so many means of telling truth, has also many means of telling lies. He may be untruthful in his very theme, if he is lacking in sanity of outlook upon the things that are. He may be untruthful in his characterization, if he interferes with his people after they are once created and attempts to coerce them to his purposes instead of allowing them to work out their own destinies. He may be untruthful in his plotting, if he devises situations arbitrarily for the sake of mere immediate effect. He may be untruthful in his dialogue, if he puts into the mouths of his people sentences that their nature does not demand that they shall speak. He may be untruthful in his comments on his characters, if the characters belie the comments in their actions and their words.

With the sort of fiction that is a tissue of lies, the present study does not concern itself; but even in the best fiction we come upon passages of falsity. There is little likelihood, however, of our being led astray by these: we revolt instinctively against them with a feeling that may best be expressed in that famous sentence of Ibsen's Assessor Brack, "People don't do such things." When Shakespeare tells us, toward the end of "As you Like It," that the wicked Oliver suddenly changed his nature and won the love of Celia, we know that he is lying. The scene is not true to the great laws of human life. When George Eliot, at a loss for a conclusion to "The Mill on the Floss," tells us that Tom and Maggie Tulliver were drowned together in a flood, we disbelieve her; just as we disbelieve Mr. J. M. Barrie when he invents that absurd accident of Tommy's death. These three instances of falsity have been selected from authors who know the truth and almost always tell it; and all three have a cer-

tain palliation. They come at or near the very end of lengthy stories. In actual life, of course, there are no very ends: life exhibits a continuous sequence of causation stretching on: and since a story has to have an end, its conclusion must in any case belie a law of nature. Probably the truth is that Tommy didn't die at all: he is living still, and always will be living. And since Mr. Barrie couldn't write forever, he may be pardoned a makeshift ending that he himself apparently did not believe in. So also we may forgive that lie of Shakespeare's, since it contributes to a general truthfulness of good-will at the conclusion of his story; and as for George Eliot — well, she had been telling the truth stolidly for many hundred pages.

But when Charlotte Brontë, in "Jane Eyre," tells us that Mr. Rochester first said and then repeated the following sentence, "I am disposed to be gregarious and communicative to-night," we find it more difficult to pardon the apparent falsity. In the same chapter, the author states that Mr. Rochester emitted the following remark: — "Then, in the first place, do you agree with me that I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt, perhaps exacting, sometimes, on the grounds I stated, namely, that I am old enough to be your father, and that I have battled through a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed over half the globe, while you have lived quietly with one set of people in one house?"

Such writing is inexcusably untrue. We cannot believe that any human being ever asked a direct question so elaborately lengthy. People do not talk like that. As a contrast, let us notice for a moment the poignant truthfulness of speech in Mr. Rudyard Kipling's story, "Only a Subaltern." A fever-stricken private says to

Bobby Wick, "Beg y' pardon, sir, disturbin' of you now, but would you min' 'oldin' my 'and, sir?" — and later, when the private becomes convalescent and Bobby in his turn is stricken down, the private suddenly stares in horror at his bed, and cries, "Oh, my Gawd! It can't be *'im!*" People talk like that.

Arbitrary plotting, as a rule, is of no avail in fiction: almost always, we know when a story is true and when it is not. We seldom believe in the long-lost will that is discovered at last on the back of a decaying picture-canvas; or in the chance meeting and mutual discovery of long-separated relatives; or in such accidental circumstances as the one, for instance, because of which Romeo fails to receive the message from Friar Laurence. The incidents of fiction at its best are not only probable but inevitable: they happen because in the nature of things they have to happen, and not because the author wants them to. Similarly, the truest characters of fiction are so real that even their creator has no power to make them do what they will not. It has been told of Thackeray that he grew so to love Colonel Newcome that he wished ardently that the good man might live happily until the end. Yet, knowing the circumstances in which the Colonel was enmeshed, and knowing also the nature of the people who formed the little circle round about him, Thackeray realized that his last days would of necessity be miserable; and realizing this, the author told the bitter truth, though it cost him many tears.

The careless reader of fiction usually supposes that, since the novelist invents his characters and incidents, he can order them always to suit his own desires: but any honest artist will tell you that his characters often grow *intractable* and stubbornly refuse at certain points to

accept the incidents which he has foreordained for them, and that at other times they take matters into their own hands and run away with the story. Stevenson has recorded this latter experience. He said, apropos of "Kidnapped," "In one of my books, and in one only, the characters took the bit in their teeth; all at once, they became detached from the flat paper, they turned their backs on me and walked off bodily; and from that time my task was stenographic — it was they who spoke, it was they who wrote the remainder of the story."

The laws of life, and not the author's will, must finally decide the destinies of heroes and of heroines. On the evening of February 3, 1850, just after he had written the last scene of "The Scarlet Letter," Hawthorne read it to his wife, — "tried to read it, rather," he wrote the next day in a letter to his friend, Horatio Bridge, "for my voice swelled and heaved, as if I were tossed up and down on an ocean as it subsides after a storm. But I was in a very nervous state then, having gone through a great diversity of emotion while writing it for many months." Is it not conceivable that, in the "great diversity of emotion" which the author experienced while bringing his story to a close, he was tempted more than once to state that Hester and Dimmesdale escaped upon the Bristol ship and thereafter expiated their offense in holy and serviceable lives? But if such a thought occurred to him, he put it by, knowing that the revelation of the scarlet letter was inexorably demanded by the highest moral law.

We are now ready to understand the statement that fiction at its best is much more true than such careless reports of actual occurrences as are published in the daily newspapers. Water that has been distilled is much

more really H_2O than the muddied natural liquid in the bulb of the retort; and life that has been clarified in the threefold alembic of the fiction-writer's mind is much more really life than the clouded and unrealized events that are reported in daily chronicles of fact. The newspaper may tell us that a man who left his office in an apparently normal state of mind went home and shot his wife: but people don't do such things; and though the story states an actual occurrence, it does not tell the truth. The only way in which the reporter could make this story true would be for him to trace out all the antecedent causes which led inevitably to the culminating incident. The incident itself can become true for us only when we are made to understand it.

Mrs. Isobel Strong, the devoted step-daughter and amanuensis of Robert Louis Stevenson, once repeated to the present writer a conversation at Vailima in which the novelist remarked that whenever, in a story by a friend of his, he came upon a passage that was notably untrue, he always suspected that it had been transcribed directly from actual life. The author had been too sure of the facts to ask himself in what way they were representative of the general laws of life. But facts are important to the careful thinker only as they are significant of truth. Doubtless an omniscient mind would realize a reason for every accidental and apparently insignificant occurrence of actual life. Doubtless, for example, the Universal Mind must understand why the great musical-director, Anton Seidl, died suddenly of ptomaine poisoning. But to a finite mind such occurrences seem unsignificant of truth; they do not seem to be indicative of a necessary law. And since the fiction-writer has a finite mind, the laws of life which he can understand are more restrictedly

logical than those undiscovered laws of actual life which pass his understanding. Many a casual occurrence of the actual world would therefore be inadmissible in the intellectually-ordered world of fiction. A novelist has no right to set forth a sequence of events which, in its causes and effects, he cannot make the reader understand.

We are now touching on a principle which is seldom appreciated by beginners in the art of fiction. Every college professor of literary composition who has accused a student of falsity in some passage of a story that the student has submitted has been met with the triumphant but unreasonable answer, "Oh, no, it's true! It happened to a friend of mine!" And it has then become necessary for the professor to explain as best he could that an actual occurrence is not necessarily true for the purposes of fiction. The imagined facts of a genuinely worthy story are exhibited merely because they are representative of some general law of life held securely in the writer's consciousness. A transcription, therefore, of actual facts fails of the purposes of fiction unless the facts in themselves are evidently representative of such a law. And many things may happen to a friend of ours without evidencing to a considerate mind any logical reason why they had to happen.

It is necessary that the student should appreciate the importance of this principle at the very outset of his apprenticeship to the art. For it is only by adhering rigorously to the truth that fiction can survive. In every period of literature, many clever authors have appeared who have diverted their contemporaries with ingenious invention, brilliant incident, unexpected novelty of character, or alluring eloquence of style, but who have have been discarded and forgotten by succeeding generations merely

because they failed to tell the truth. Probably in the whole range of English fiction there is no more skilful weaver of enthralling plots, no more clever master of invention or manipulator of suspense, than Wilkie Collins; but Collins is already discarded and well-nigh forgotten, because the reading world has found that he exhibited no truths of genuine importance, but rather sacrificed the eternal realities of life for mere momentary plausibilities. Probably, also, there is no artist in French prose more seductive in his eloquence than René de Chateaubriand; but his fiction is no longer read, because the world has found that his sentimentalism was to this extent a sham, — it was false to the nature of normal human beings. "Alice in Wonderland" will survive the works of both these able authors, because of the many and momentous human truths that look upon us through its drift of dreams.

The whole question of the morality or immorality of a work of fiction is a question merely of its truth or falsity. To appreciate this point, we must first be careful to distinguish immorality from coarseness. The morality of a fiction-writer is not dependent on the decency of his expression. In fact, the history of literature shows that authors frankly coarse, like Rabelais or Swift for instance, have rarely or never been immoral; and that the most immoral books have been written in the most delicate language. Swift and Rabelais are moral, because they tell the truth with sanity and vigor: we may object to certain passages in their writings on esthetic, but not on ethical, grounds. They may offend our taste; but they are not likely to lead astray our judgment: — far less likely than D'Annunzio, for instance, who, although he *never offends* the most delicate esthetic taste, sicklies o'er

with the pale cast of his poetry a sad unsanity of outlook upon the ultimate deep truths of human life. In the second place, we must bravely realize that the morality of a work of fiction has little or no dependence on the subject that it treats. It is utterly unjust to the novelist to decide, as many unreasonable readers do, that such a book as Daudet's "Sapho" must be of necessity immoral because it exhibits immoral characters in a series of immoral acts. There is no such thing as an immoral subject for a novel: in the treatment of the subject, and only in the treatment, lies the basis for ethical judgment of the work. The one thing needful in order that a novel may be moral is that the author shall maintain throughout his work a sane and healthy insight into the soundness or unsoundness of the relations between his characters. He must know when they are right and know when they are wrong, and must make clear to us the reasons for his judgment. He cannot be immoral unless he is untrue. To make us pity his characters when they are vile, or love them when they are noxious, to invent excuses for them in situations where they cannot be excused, to leave us satisfied when their baseness has been unbetrayed, to make us wonder if after all the exception is not greater than the rule, — in a single word, to lie about his characters: — this is, for the fiction-writer the one unpardonable sin.

But it is not an easy thing to tell the truth of human life, and nothing but the truth. The best of fiction-writers fall to falsehood now and then; and it is only by honest labor and sincere strife for the ideal that they contrive in the main to fulfil the purpose of their art. But the writer of fiction must be not only honest and sincere; he must be wise as well. Wisdom is the faculty of seeing through and all around an object of contemplation, and

understanding totally and at once its relations to all other objects. This faculty cannot be acquired; it has to be developed: and it is developed by experience only. Experience ordinarily requires time; and though, for special reasons which will be noted later on, most of the great short-story writers have been young, we are not surprised to notice that most of the great novelists have been men mature in years. They have ripened slowly to a realization of those truths which later they have labored to impart. Richardson, the father of the modern English novel, was fifty-one years old when "Pamela" was published; Scott was forty-three when "Waverley" appeared; Hawthorne was forty-six when he wrote "The Scarlet Letter"; Thackeray and George Eliot were well on their way to the forties when they completed "Vanity Fair" and "Adam Bede"; and these are the first novels of each writer.

The young author who aspires to write novels must not only labor to acquire the technic of his art: it is even more important that he should so order his life as to grow cunning in the basic truths of human nature. His first problem — the problem of acquiring technic — is comparatively easy. Technic may be learned from books — the master-works of art in fiction. It may be studied empirically. The student may observe what the masters have, and have not, done; and he may puzzle out the reasons why. And he may perhaps be helped by constructive critics of fiction in his endeavor to understand these reasons. But his second problem — the problem of developing wisdom — is more difficult; and he must grapple with it without any aid from books. What he learns of human life, he must learn in his own way, *without* extraneous assistance.

It is easy enough for the student to learn, for instance, how the great short-stories have been constructed. It is easy enough for the critic, on the basis of such knowledge, to formulate empirically the principles of this special art of narrative. But it is not easy for the student to discover, or for the critic to suggest, how a man in his early twenties may develop such a wise insight into human life as is displayed, for example, in Mr. Kipling's "Without Benefit of Clergy." A few suggestions may, perhaps, be offered; but they must be considered merely as suggestions, and must not be overvalued.

At the outset, it may be noted that the writer of fiction needs two different endowments of experience: — first, a broad and general experience of life at large; and second, a deep and specific experience of that particular phase of life which he wishes to depict. A general and broad experience is common to all masters of the art of fiction: it is in the particular nature of their specific and deep experience that they differ one from another. Although in range and sweep of general knowledge Sir Walter Scott was far more vast than Jane Austen, he confessed amazement at the depth of her specific knowledge of every-day English middle-class society. Most of the great novelists have made, like Jane Austen, a special study of some particular field. Hawthorne is an authority on Puritan New England, Thackeray on London high society, Mr. Henry James on cosmopolitan super-civilization. It would seem, therefore, that a young author, while keeping his observation fresh for all experience, should devote especial notice to experience of some particular phase of life. But along comes Mr. Rudyard Kipling, with his world-engirdling knowledge, to jostle us out of faith in too narrow a focus of attention.

Experience is of two sorts, extensive and intensive. A mere glance at the range of Mr. Kipling's subjects would show us the breadth of his extensive experience: evidently he has lived in many lands and looked with sympathy upon the lives of many sorts of people. But in certain stories, like his "They" for instance, we are arrested rather by the depth of his intensive experience. "They" reveals to us an author who not necessarily has roamed about the world, but who necessarily has felt all phases of the mother-longing in a woman. The things that Mr. Kipling knows in "They" could never have been learned except through sympathy.

Intensive experience is immeasurably more valuable to the fiction-writer than extensive experience: but the difficulty is that, although the latter may be gained through the obvious expedients of travel and voluntary association with many and various types of people, the former can never be gained through any amount of deliberate and conscious seeking. The great intensive experiences of life, like love and friendship, must come unsought if they are to come at all; and no man can gain a genuine experience of any joy or sorrow by experimenting purposely with life. The deep experiences must be watched and waited for. The author must be ever ready to realize them when they come: when they knock upon his door, he must not make the mistake of answering that he is not at home. But he must not make the contrary mistake of going out into the highways and hedges to compel them to come within his gates.

Undoubtedly, very few people are always at home for every real experience that knocks upon their doors: very few people, to say the thing more simply, have an experiencing nature. But great fiction may be written only by

men of an experiencing nature; and here is a basis for confession that, after all, fiction-writers are born, not made. The experiencing nature is difficult to define; but two of its most evident qualities, at any rate, are a lively curiosity and a ready sympathy. A combination of these two qualities gives a man that intensity of interest in human life which is a condition precedent to his ever growing to understand it. Curiosity, for instance, is the most obvious asset in Mr. Kipling's equipment. We did not need his playful confession in the "Just So Stories" —

> "I keep six honest serving-men
> (They taught me all I knew):—
> Their names are What and Why and When
> And How and Where and Who" —

to convince us that from his very early youth he has been an indefatigable asker of questions. It was only through a healthy curiosity that he could have acquired the enormous stores of specific knowledge concerning almost every walk of life that he has displayed in his successive volumes. On the other hand, it was obviously through his vast endowment of sympathy that Dickens was able to learn so thoroughly all phases of the life of the lowly in London.

Experience gravitates to the man who is both curious and sympathetic. The kindgom of adventure is within us. Just as we create beauty in an object when we look upon it beautifully, so we create adventure all around us when we walk the world inwardly aglow with love of life. Things of interest happened to Robert Louis Stevenson every day of his existence, because he incorporated the faculty of being interested in things. In one of his most glowing essays, "The Lantern-Bearers," he declared that never an hour of his life had gone dully yet; if it had

been spent waiting at a railway junction, he had had some scattering thoughts, he had counted some grains of memory, compared to which the whole of many romances seemed but dross. The author who aspires to write fiction should cultivate the faculty of caring for all things that come to pass; he should train himself rigorously never to be bored; he should look upon all life that swims into his ken with curious and sympathetic eyes, remembering always that sympathy is a deeper faculty than curiosity: and because of the profound joy of his interest in life, he should endeavor humbly to earn that heritage of interest by developing a thorough understanding of its source. In this way, perhaps, he may grow aware of certain truths of life which are materials for fiction. If so, he will have accomplished the better half of his work: he will have found something to say.

CHAPTER II

REALISM AND ROMANCE

ALTHOUGH all writers of fiction who take their work seriously and do it honestly are at one in their purpose — namely, to embody certain truths of human life in a series of imagined facts — they diverge into two contrasted groups according to their manner of accomplishing this purpose, — their method of exhibiting the truth. Consequently we find in practice two contrasted schools of novelists, which we distinguish by the titles Realistic and Romantic.

The distinction between realism and romance is fundamental and deep-seated; for every man, whether consciously or not, is either a romantic or a realist in the dominant habit of his thought. The reader who is a realist by nature will prefer George Eliot to Scott; the reader who is romantic will rather read Victor Hugo than Flaubert; and neither taste is better than the other. Each reader's preference is born with his brain, and has its origin in his customary processes of thinking. In view of this fact, it seems strange that no adequate definition has ever yet been made of the difference between realism and romance.[1] Various superficial explanations have been offered, it is true; but none of them has been scientific and satisfactory.

One of the most common of these superficial explana-

[1] The theory which follows in this chapter was first announced by the present writer in *The Dial* for November 16, 1904.

tions is the one which has been phrased by Mr. F. Marion Crawford in his little book upon "The Novel: What It Is": — "The realist proposes to show men what they are; the romantist (*sic*) tries to show men what they should be." The trouble with this distinction is that it utterly fails to distinguish. Surely all novelists, whether realistic or romantic, try to show men what they are: — what else can be their reason for embodying in imagined facts the truths of human life? Victor Hugo, the romantic, in "Les Miserables", endeavors just as honestly and earnestly to show men what they are as does Flaubert, the realist, in "Madame Bovary." And on the other hand, Thackeray, the realist, in characters like Henry Esmond and Colonel Newcome, shows men what they should be just as thoroughly as the romantic Scott. Indeed, it is hardly possible to conceive how any novelist, whether romantic or realistic, could devise a means of showing the one thing without at the same time showing the other also. Every important fiction-writer, no matter to which of the two schools he happens to belong, strives to accomplish, in a single effort of creation, *both* of the purposes noted by Mr. Crawford. He may be realistic or romantic in his way of showing men what they are; realistic or romantic in his way of showing them what they should be: the difference lies, not in which of the two he tries to show, but in the way he tries to show it.

Again, we have been told that, in their stories, the romantics dwell mainly upon the element of action, while the realists are interested chiefly in the element of character. But this explanation fails many times to fit the facts: for the great romantic characters, like Leatherstocking, Don Quixote, Monte Cristo, Claude Frollo, are just as vividly drawn as the great characters of realism;

and the great events of realistic novels, like Rawdon Crawley's discovery of his wife with Lord Steyne, or Adam Bede's fight with Arthur Donnithorne, are just as thrilling as the resounding actions of romance. Furthermore, if we should accept this explanation, we should find ourselves unable to classify as either realistic or romantic the very large body of novels in which neither element — of action or of character — shows any marked preponderance over the other. Mr. Henry James, in his genial essay on "The Art of Fiction," has cast a vivid light on this objection. "There is an old-fashioned distinction," he says, "between the novel of character and the novel of incident which must have cost many a smile to the intending fabulist who was keen about his work. . . . What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? . . . It is an incident for a woman to stand up with her hand resting on a table and look out at you in a certain way; or if it be not an incident I think it will be hard to say what it is. At the same time it is an expression of character."

We have been told also that the realists paint the manners of their own place and time, while the romantics deal with more remote materials. But this distinction, likewise, often fails to hold. No stories were ever more essentially romantic than Stevenson's "New Arabian Nights," which depict details of London and Parisian life at the time when the author wrote them; and no novel is more essentially realistic than "Romola," which carries us back through many centuries to a medieval city far away. Thackeray, the realist, in "Henry Esmond" and its sequel "The Virginians," departed further from his own time and place than Hawthorne, the romantic, in "The House of the Seven Gables"; and while the realistic

Mr. Meredith frequently fares abroad in his stories, especially to Italy, the romantic Mr. Barrie looks upon life almost always from his own little window in Thrums.

In his interesting and suggestive "Study of Prose Fiction," Professor Bliss Perry has devoted a chapter to realism and another to romance; but he has not succeeded in defining either term. He has, to be sure, essayed a negative definition of realism: — "Realistic fiction is that which does not shrink from the commonplace or from the unpleasant in its effort to depict things as they are, life as it is." But we have seen that the effort of all fiction, whether realistic or romantic, is to depict life as it *really* (though not necessarily as it *actually*) is. Does not "The Brushwood Boy," although it suggests the super-actual, set forth a common truth of the most intimate human relationship, which every lover recognizes as real? Every great writer of fiction tries, in his own romantic or realistic way, to "draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things as They Are." We must therefore focus our attention mainly on the earlier phrases of Professor Perry's definition. He states that realistic fiction does not shrink from the commonplace. That depends. The realism of Jules and Edmond de Goncourt does not, to be sure; but most assuredly the realism of Mr. Meredith does. You will find far less shrinking from the commonplace in many passages of the romantic Fenimore Cooper than in the pages of Mr. Meredith. Whether or not realistic fiction shrinks from the unpleasant depends also on the particular nature of the realist. Zola's realism certainly does not; Jane Austen's decidedly does. You will find far less shrinking from the unpleasant, of one sort, in Poe, of another sort, in Catulle Mendès — both of them romantics — than in the novels of Jane Austen.

What is the use, then, of Professor Perry's definition of realism, since it remains open to so many exceptions? And in his chapter on romance the critic does not even attempt to formulate a definition.

We have now examined several of the current explanations of the difference between romance and realism and have found that each is wanting. The trouble with all of them seems to be that they attempt to find a basis for distinguishing between the two schools of fiction in the subject-matter, or materials, of the novelist. Does not the real distinction lie rather in the novelist's attitude of mind toward his materials, whatever those materials may be? Surely there is no such thing inherently as a realistic subject or a romantic subject. The very same subject may be treated realistically by one novelist and romantically by another. George Eliot would have built a realistic novel on the theme of "The Scarlet Letter"; and Hawthorne would have made a romance out of the materials of "Silas Marner." The whole of human life, or any part of it, offers materials for romantic and realist alike. Therefore no distinction between the schools is possible upon the basis of subject-matter: the real distinction must be one of method in setting subject-matter forth. The distinction is not external, but internal; it dwells in the mind of the novelist; it is a matter for philosophic, not for literary, investigation.

If we seek within the mental habits of the novelist for a philosophic distinction between realism and romance, we shall have to return to a consideration of that threefold process of the fiction-making mind which was expounded in the preceding chapter of this book. Scientific discovery, philosophic understanding, and artistic expression of the truths of human life are phases of creation common to

romantics and realists alike; but though the writers of both schools meet equally upon the central ground of philosophic understanding, is it not evident that the realists are most interested in looking backward over the antecedent ground of scientific discovery, and the romantics are most interested in looking forward over the subsequent ground of artistic expression? Suppose, for the purpose of illustration, that two novelists of equal ability — the one a realist, the other a romantic — have observed and studied carefully the same events and characters of actual life; and suppose further that they agree in their conception of the truth behind the facts. Suppose now that each of them writes a novel to embody this conception of the truth, in which they are agreed. Will not the realist regard as most important the scientific process of discovery by means of which he arrived at his conception; and will he not therefore strive to make that process clear to the reader by turning back to the point at which he began his observations and then leading the reader forward through a similar scientific study of imagined facts until the reader joins him on the ground of philosophic understanding? And on the other hand, will not the romantic regard as most important the artistic process of embodying his conception; and will he not therefore be satisfied with any means of embodying it clearly and effectively, without caring whether or not the imagined facts which he selects for this purpose are similar to the actual facts from which he first induced his philosophic understanding? This thought was apparently in Hawthorne's mind when, in the preface to "The House of the Seven Gables," he wrote his well-known distinction between the Romance and the (realistic) Novel: —

"*When* a writer calls his work a Romance, it need

hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former — while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart — has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation."

But Hawthorne's statement, although it covers the ground, is not succinct and definitive; and if we are to examine the thesis thoroughly, we had better first state it in philosophic terms and then elucidate the statement by explanation and by illustration. So stated, the distinction is as follows: *In setting forth his view of life, the realist follows the inductive method of presentment, and the romantic follows the deductive method.*

The distinction between inductive and deductive processes of thinking is very simple and is known to all: it is based upon the *direction* of the train of thought. When we think inductively, we reason from the particular to the general; and when we think deductively, the process proceeds in the reverse direction and we reason from the general to the particular. In our ordinary conversation, we speak inductively when we first mention a number of specific facts and then draw from them some general inference; and we speak deductively when we first express a general opinion and then elucidate it by adducing specific illustrations. That old dichotomy of the psychologists which divides all men, according to their habits

of thought, into Platonists and Aristotelians (or, to substitute a modern nomenclature, into Cartesians and Baconians) is merely an assertion that every man, in the prevailing direction of his thinking, is either deductive or inductive. Most of the great ethical philosophers have had inductive minds: from the basis of admitted facts of experience they have reasoned out their laws of conduct. Most of the great religious teachers have had deductive minds: from the basis of certain sublime assumptions they have asserted their commandments. Most of the great scientists have thought inductively: they have reasoned from specific facts to general truths, as Newton reasoned from the fall of an apple to the law of gravitation. Most of the great poets have thought deductively: they have reasoned from general truths to specific facts, as Dante reasoned from a general moral conception of cosmogony to the particular appropriate details of every circle in hell and purgatory and paradise. Now is not the thesis tenable that it is in just this way that realism differs from romance? In their endeavor to exhibit certain truths of human life, do not the realists work inductively and the romantics deductively?

In order to bring to our knowledge the law of life which he wishes to make clear, the realist first leads us through a series of imagined facts as similar as possible to the details of actual life which he studied in order to arrive at his general conception. He elaborately imitates the facts of actual life, so that he may say to us finally, "This is the sort of thing that I have seen in the world, and from this I have learned the truth I have to tell you." He leads us step by step from the particular to the general, until we gradually grow aware of the truths he wishes to express. *In the end,* we have not only grown acquainted with

these truths, but have also been made familiar with every step in the process of thought by which the author himself became aware of them. "Adam Bede" tells us not only what George Eliot knew of life, but also how she came to learn it.

But the romantic novelist leads us in the contrary direction — namely, from the general to the particular. He does not attempt to show us how he arrived at his general conception. His only care is to convey his general idea effectively by giving it a specific illustrative embodiment. He feels no obligation to make the imagined facts of his story resemble closely the details of actual life; he is anxious only that they shall represent his idea adequately and consistently. Stevenson knew that man has a dual nature, and that the evil in him, when pampered, will gradually gain the upper hand over the good. In his story of the "Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," he did not attempt to set forth this truth inductively, showing us the kind of facts from the observation of which he had drawn this conclusion. He merely gave his thought an illustrative embodiment, by conceiving a dual character in which a man's uglier self should have a separate incarnation. He constructed his tale deductively: beginning with a general conception, he reduced it to particular terms. "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" is, of course, a thoroughly true story, even though its incidents are contrary to the actual facts of life. It is just as real as a realistic novel; but in order to make it so, its author, because he was working deductively, was not obliged to imitate the details of actual life which he had studied. "I have learned something in the world," he says to us: "Here is a fable that will make it clear to you."

This philosophic distinction between the methods of

romance and realism shows two manifest advantages over all the other attempts at a distinction which have been examined in this chapter: first, it really does distinguish; and secondly, it will be found in every case to fit the facts. Furthermore, it is supported in an overwhelming manner by the history of human thought. Every student of philosophy will tell you that the world's thought was prevailingly deductive till the days of Francis Bacon. Bacon was the first philosopher to insist that induction, rather than deduction, was the most effective method of searching for the truth. Science, which is based upon induction, was in its infancy when Bacon taught: since then it has matured, largely because he and his successors in philosophy pointed out the only method through which it might develop. Deduction has of course survived as a method of conducting thought; but it has lost the undisputed empery which it held over the ancient and the medieval mind. Now, if we turn to the history of fiction, we shall notice the significant fact that realism is a strictly modern product. All fiction was romantic till the days of Bacon. Realism is contemporaneous with modern science and the other applications of inductive thought. Romance survives, of course; but it has lost the undisputed empery of fiction which it held in ancient and in medieval times. If Bacon had written fiction, he would have been a realist — the first realist in the history of literature; and this is the only reply that is necessary to those who still maintain (if any do) that he was capable of writing the romantic plays of Shakespeare.

If it be granted now that the realist, by induction, leads his reader up from a consideration of imagined facts to a comprehension of truth, and that the romantic, by deduction, leads his reader down from an apprehension of truth

to a consideration of imagined facts, we may next examine certain advantages and disadvantages of each method in comparison with the other.

In the first place, we notice that, while the imagined facts of the romantic are selected merely to illustrate the truth he wishes to convey, the imagined facts of the realist are selected not only to illustrate, but also to support, the truth that lies inherent in them. The realist, then, has this advantage over the romantic in his method of expressing truth: he has the opportunity to prove his case by presenting the evidence on which his truth is based. It is therefore less difficult for him to conquer credence from a skeptical and wary reader: and we must remember always that even though a story tells the truth, it is still a failure unless it gets that truth believed. The romantic necessarily demands a deeper faith in his wisdom than the realist need ask for; and he can evoke deep faith only by absolute sincerity and utter clearness in the presentation of his fable. Unless the reader of "The Brushwood Boy" and "They" has absolute faith that Mr. Kipling knows the truth of his themes, the stories are reduced to nonsense; for they present no evidence (through running parallel to actuality) which proves that the author *does* know the truth. Unless the reader has faith that Stevenson deeply understands the nature of remorse, the conversation between Markheim and his ghostly visitant becomes incredible and vain. The author gives himself no opportunity to prove (through analogy with actual experience) that such a colloquy consistently presents the inner truth of conscience.

But this great advantage of the realist — that he supports his theme with evidence — carries with it an attendant disadvantage. Since he lays his evidence bare before

the reader, he makes it simpler for the reader to detect him in a lie. The romantic says, "These things are so, because I know they are"; and unless we reject him at once and in entirety as a colossal liar, we are almost doomed to take his word in the big moments of his story. But the realist says, "These things are so, because they are supported by actual facts similar to the imagined facts in which I clothe them"; and we may answer at any point in the story, "Not at all! On the very basis of the facts you show us, we know better than to take your word." In other words, when the reader disbelieves a romance, he does so by instinct, without necessarily knowing why; but when he disbelieves a realistic novel, he does so by logic, with the evidence before him.

A great romantic, therefore, must have the wisdom that convinces by its very presence and conquers credence through the reader's intuition. Who could disbelieve the author of "The Scarlet Letter"? We do not need to see his evidence in order to know that he knows. A great realist, on the other hand, while he need not have the triumphant and engaging mental personality necessary to a great romantic, must have a thorough and complete equipment of evidence discerned from observation of the actual. He must have eyes and ears, though he need not have a soul.

A novelist of realistic bent is, therefore, almost doomed to confine his fiction to his own place and time. In no other period or nation can he be so certain of his evidence. We know the enormous labor with which George Eliot amassed the materials for "Romola," a realistic study of Florence during the Renaissance; but though we recognize the work as that of a thorough student, the details *still* fail to convince us as do the details of her studies of

contemporary Warwickshire. The young aspirant to the art of fiction who knows himself to be an incipient realist had therefore best confine his efforts to attempted reproduction of the life he sees about him. He had better accept the common-sensible advice which the late Sir Walter Besant gave in his lecture on "The Art of Fiction": "A young lady brought up in a quiet country village should avoid descriptions of garrison life; a writer whose friends and personal experiences belong to what we call the lower middle class should carefully avoid introducing his characters into society; a South-countryman would hesitate before attempting to reproduce the North-country accent. This is a very simple rule, but one to which there should be no exception — never to go beyond your own experience."

The incipient realist is almost obliged to accept this advice; but the incipient romantic need not necessarily do so. That final injunction of Besant's — "never to go beyond your own experience" — seems somewhat stultifying to the imagination; and there is a great deal of very wise suggestion in Mr. Henry James' reply to it: "What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end? . . . The young lady living in a village has only to be a damsel upon whom nothing is lost to make it quite unfair (as it seems to me) to declare to her that she shall have nothing to say about the military. Greater miracles have been seen than that, imagination assisting, she should speak the truth about some of these gentlemen." The romantic "upon whom nothing is lost," may, "imagination assisting," project his truth into some other region of experience than those which he has actually observed. Edgar Allan Poe is indubitably one of the great masters of the art of fiction; but there is nothing in any

of his stories to indicate that he was born in Boston, lived in Richmond, Philadelphia, and New York, and died in Baltimore. "The Assignation" indicates that he had lived in Venice, — where, in fact, he had never been; others of his stories have the atmosphere of other times and lands; and most of them pass in a dream-world of his own creation, "out of space, out of time."

So long as the romantic is sure of his truth and certain of his power to convince the reader, he need not support his truth by an accumulation of evidence imitated from the actual life he has observed. But on the other hand, there is nothing to prevent his doing so; and unless he be very headstrong, — so headstrong as to be almost unreliable, — he will be extremely chary of his freedom. He will not subvert the actual unless there is no other equally effective means of conveying the truth he has to tell. Many times a close adherence to actuality is as advisable for the deductive author as it is for the inductive; many times the romantic writer gains as much as the realist by confining his fiction to his own environment of time and place. Scott, after all, was less successful with his medieval kings and knights than with his homely and simple Scottish characters. Hawthorne, in "The Marble Faun," lost a certain completeness of effect by stepping off his own New England shadow. "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," with its subversion of the actual, is the sort of story that might be set out of space, out of time; but Stevenson enhanced the effect of its imaginative plausibility by setting it in contemporary London. More and more, in recent years, the romantics have followed the lead of the realists in embodying their truth in scenes and characters imitated from actuality. The early stories of the thoroughly romantic Mr. Kipling

were set in his own country, India, and in his own time; and it was not until his actual experience had broadened to other lands, that, to any great extent, his subjects broadened geographically. In his stories of his own people, Mr. Kipling just as faithfully portrays the every-day existence he has actually observed as any realist. His method is romantic always: he deduces his details from his theme, instead of inducing his theme from his details. He is entirely romantic in the direction of his thought; but it is very suggestive of the tenor of contemporary romance, to notice that he has taken the advice of the realists and seldom gone beyond his own experience.

The range of romance is therefore far wider than the range of realism; for all that may be treated realistically may be treated romantically also, and much else that may be treated romantically is hardly susceptible of realistic treatment. Granted that a romantic have truths enough in his head, there is scarcely any limit to the stories he may deduce from them; while, on the other hand, the work of the inductive novelist is limited by the limits of his premises. But the greater freedom of romance is attended by a more difficult responsibility. If it be easier for the romantic to tell the truth, because he has more ways of telling it, it is surely harder for him to tell nothing but the truth. More often than the realist he is tempted to assert uncertainties — tempted to say with vividness and charm things of which he cannot quite be sure.

But whatever may be the comparative advantages and disadvantages of each method of exhibiting the truth, it is absolutely certain that either method of presentment is natural and logical; and hence all criticism that aims to exalt romance above realism, or realism above romance,

must be forever futile. Guy de Maupassant, in his valuable preface to "Pierre et Jean," has spoken very wisely on this point. The ideal critic, he says, should demand of the artist merely to "create something beautiful, in the form most convenient to him, according to his temperament." And he states further: — "The critic should appraise the result only according to the nature of the effort. . . . He should admit with an equal interest the contrasted theories of art, and judge the works resultant from them only from the standpoint of their artistic worth, accepting *a priori* the general ideas from which they owe their origin. To contest the right of an author to make a romantic or a realistic work is to wish to force him to modify his temperament, refuse to recognize his originality, and not permit him to employ the eye and the intellect which nature has given him. Let us allow him the liberty to understand, to observe, and to conceive in whatever way he wishes, provided that he be an artist."

Surely this is the only sane view of the situation. Therefore, when Mr. W. D. Howells, in his dexterous little book on "Criticism and Fiction," pleads engagingly for realism as the only valid method for the modern novelist, and when Stevenson, in many an alluring essay, blows blasts upon the trumpet of romance, and challenges the realists to show excuse for their existence, each is fighting an unnecessary battle, since each is at the same time right and wrong. Each is right in asserting the value of his own method, and wrong in denying the value of the other's. The minds of men have always moved in two directions, and always will; and as long as men shall write, we shall have, and ought to have, both inductive and deductive fiction.

Neither of the two methods is truer than the other; and both are great when they are well employed. Each, however, lends itself to certain abuses which it will be well for us to notice briefly. The realist, on the one hand, in his careful imitation of actual life, may grow near-sighted and come to value facts for their own sake, forgetting that his primary purpose in setting them forth should be to lead us to understand the truths which underlie them. More and more, as the realist advances in technic and gains in ability to represent the actual, he is tempted to make photographs of life instead of pictures. A picture differs from a photograph mainly in its artistic repression of the unsignificant; it exhibits life more truly because it focuses attention on essentials. But any novel that dwells sedulously upon non-essentials and exalts the unsignificant obscures the truth. This is the fallacy of the photographic method; and from this fallacy arise the tedious minuteness of George Eliot in her more pedestrian moments, the interminable tea-cups of Anthony Trollope, and the mire of the imitators of Zola. Realism latterly, especially in France, has shown a tendency to degenerate into so-called "naturalism," a method of art which casts the unnatural emphasis of photographic reproduction upon phases of actual life which are base in themselves and unsignificant of the eternal instinct which leads men more naturally to look upward at the stars than downward at the mud. The "naturalistic" writers are deceived in thinking that they represent life as it really is. If their thesis were true, the human race would have dwindled to extinction long ago. Surely a photograph of a slattern in the gutter is no more natural than a picture of Rosalind in the Forest of Arden; and no accuracy of imitated actuality can make it more significant of truth.

The romantic, on the other hand, because he works with greater freedom than the realist, may overleap himself and express in a loose fashion general conceptions which are hasty and devoid of truth. To this defect is owing the vast deal of rubbish which has been foisted on us recently by feeble imitators of Scott and Dumas père, — imitators who have assumed the trappings and the suits of the accredited masters of romance, but have not inherited their clarity of vision into the inner truth of things that are. To such degenerate romance, Professor Brander Matthews has applied the term "romanticism"; and though his use of the term itself may be considered a little too special for general currency, no exception can be taken to the distinction which he enforces in the following paragraph. "The Romantic calls up the idea of something primary, spontaneous, and perhaps medieval, while the Romanticist suggests something secondary, conscious, and of recent fabrication. Romance, like many another thing of beauty, is very rare; but Romanticism is common enough nowadays. The truly Romantic is difficult to achieve; but the artificial Romanticist is so easy as to be scarce worth the attempting. The Romantic is ever young, ever fresh, ever delightful; but the Romanticist is stale and second-hand and unendurable. Romance is never in danger of growing old, for it deals with the spirit of man without regard to times and seasons; but Romanticism gets out of date with every twist of the kaleidoscope of literary fashion. The Romantic is eternally and essentially true, but the Romanticist is inevitably false. Romance is sterling, but Romanticism is shoddy."

But the Scylla and the Charybdis of fiction-writing may both be avoided. The realists gain nothing by hooting

at the abuses of romance; and the romantics gain as little by yawning over realism at its worst. "The conditions" — to use a phrase of Emerson's — "are hard but equal": and at their best, the realist, working inductively, and the romantic, working deductively, are equally able to present the truth of fiction.

CHAPTER III

THE NATURE OF NARRATIVE

We have now considered the subject-matter of fiction and also the contrasted attitudes of mind of the two great schools of fiction-writers toward setting forth that subject-matter. We must next turn our attention to the technical methods of presenting the materials of fiction, and notice in detail the most important devices employed by all fiction-writers in order to fulfil the purpose of their art.

Rhetoricians, as everybody knows, arbitrarily but conveniently distinguish four forms, or moods, or methods, of discourse: namely, narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. It may be stated without fear of well-founded contradiction that the natural mood, or method, of fiction is the first of these, — narration. Argumentation, for its own sake, has no place in a work of fiction. There is, to be sure, a type of novel, which is generally called in English "the novel with a purpose," the aim of which is to persuade the reader to accept some special thesis that the author holds concerning politics, religion, social ethics, or some other of the phases of life that are readily open to discussion. But such a novel usually fails of its purpose if it attempts to accomplish it by employing the technical devices of argument. It can best fulfil its purpose by exhibiting indisputable truths of life, without persuasive comment, *ex cathedra*, on the part of the novelist. In vain he argues, denounces, or

defends, appeals to us or coaxes us, unless his story in the first place convinces by its very truthfulness. If his thesis be as incontestable as the author thinks it is, it can prove itself by narrative alone.

Exposition, for its own sake, is also out of place in fiction. The aim of exposition is to explain, — an aim necessarily abstract; but the purpose of fiction is to represent life, — a purpose necessarily concrete. To discourse of life in abstract terms is to subvert the natural mood of art; and the novelist may make his meaning just as clear by representing life concretely, without a running commentary of analysis and explanation. Life truly represented will explain itself. There are, to be sure, a number of great novelists, of whom George Eliot may be taken as the type, who frequently halt their story to write an essay about it. These essays are often instructive in themselves, but they are not fiction, because they do not embody their truths in imagined facts of human life. George Eliot is at one moment properly a novelist, and at the next moment a discursive expositor. She would be still greater as a novelist, and a novelist merely, if she could make her meaning clear without digressing to another art.

Description also, in the most artistic fiction, is used only as subsidiary and contributive to narration. The aim of description — which is to suggest the look of things at a certain characteristic moment — is an aim necessarily static. But life — which the novelist purposes to represent — is not static but dynamic. The aim of description is pictorial: but life does not hold its pictures; it melts and merges them one into another with headlong hurrying progression. A novelist who devotes two successive pages to the description of a landscape or a person, necessarily makes his story stand still while he

is doing it, and thereby belies an obvious law of life. Therefore, as writers of fiction have progressed in art, they have more and more eliminated description for its own sake.

Since, then, the natural mood, or method, of fiction is narration, it is necessary that we should devote especial study to the nature of narrative. And in a study frankly technical we may be aided at the outset by a definition, which may subsequently be explained in all its bearings.

A narrative is a representation of a series of events. This is a very simple definition; and only two words of it can possibly demand elucidation. These words are *series* and *event*. The word *event* will be explained fully in a later section of this chapter: meanwhile it may be understood loosely as synonymous with *happening*. Let us first examine the exact meaning of the word *series*.

The word *series* implies much more than the word *succession:* it implies a relation not merely chronological but also logical; and the logical relation it implies is that of cause and effect. In any section of actual life which we examine, the events are likely to appear merely in succession and not in series. One event follows another immediately in time, but does not seem linked to it immediately by the law of causation. What you do this morning does not often necessitate as a logical consequence what you do this afternoon; and what you do this evening is not often a logical result of what you have done during the day. Any transcript from actual life that is not deliberately arranged and logically patterned is therefore likely not to be a narrative. A passage from a diary, for instance, which states events in the order of their happening but makes no attempt to present them as *links* in a chain of causation, is not, technically speaking,

narrative in method. To illustrate this point, let us open at random the diary of Samuel Pepys. Here is his entry for April 29, 1666: —

"To Church, where Mr. Mills, a lazy sermon upon the Devil's having no right to anything in this world. To Mr. Evelyn's, where I walked in his garden till he come from Church, with great pleasure reading Ridley's discourse, all my way going and coming, upon the Civil and Ecclesiastical Law. He being come home, he and I walked together in the garden with mighty pleasure, he being a very ingenious man; and, the more I know him, the more I love him. Weary to bed, after having my hair of my head cut shorter, even close to my skull, for coolness, it being mighty hot weather."

There is no logical continuity in the worthy diarist's faithful chronicle of actuality. What occasioned the weariness with which he went to bed? It could not have been the company of Mr. Evelyn, whom he loved; it could hardly have been the volume on the civil and ecclesiastical law, though its title does suggest the soporific. Was his strength, like Samson's, shorn away with the hair of his head; or can it be that that lazy sermon of Mr. Mills' got in its deadening effects at bedtime? We notice, at any rate, that the diarist's remarks need considerable re-arrangement to make them really narrative.

Yet it is just in this way that commonly event succeeds event in the daily life of every one. It is only in the great passionate crises of existence that event treads upon event in uninterrupted sequence of causation. And here is the main formal difference between life as it actually happens and life as it is artistically represented in history, biography, and fiction. In every art there are two steps:

first, the selection of essentials, and secondly, the arrangement of these essentials according to a pattern. In the art of narration, events are first selected because they suggest an essential logical relation to each other; and they are then arranged along the lines of a pattern of causation. Let us compare with the haphazard passage from Pepys a bit of narrative that is artistically patterned. Here is the conclusion to Stevenson's story of "Markheim." The hero, having slain a dealer in his shop on Christmas day, spends a long time alone, ransacking the dealer's effects and listening to the voice of conscience. He is interrupted by a ringing of the door-bell. The dealer's maid has returned from holidaying. —

"He opened the door and went downstairs very slowly, thinking to himself. His past went soberly before him; he beheld it as it was, ugly and strenuous like a dream, random as a chance-medley — a scene of defeat. Life, as he thus reviewed it, tempted him no longer; but on the further side he perceived a quiet haven for his bark. He paused in the passage, and looked into the shop, where the candle still burned by the dead body. It was strangely silent. Thoughts of the dealer swarmed into his mind as he stood gazing. And then the bell once more broke out into impatient clamor.

"He confronted the maid upon the threshold with something like a smile.

"'You had better go for the police,' said he: 'I have killed your master.'"

The last sentence of this passage is an effect which is logically led up to by many causes that are rapidly reviewed in the preceding sentences. Stevenson has here patterned a passage of life along lines of causation; he has *employed the logical* method of narration: but Pepys, in

the selection quoted, looked upon events with no narrative sense whatever.

The narrative sense is, primarily, an ability to trace an event back to its logical causes and to look forward to its logical effects. It is the sense through which we realize, for instance, that what happened at two o'clock to-day, although it may not have resulted necessarily from what happened an hour before, was the logical outcome of something else that happened at noon on the preceding Thursday, let us say, and that this in turn was the result of causes stretching back through many months. A well-developed narrative sense in looking on at life is very rare. Every one, of course, is able to refer the headache of the morning after to the hilarity of the night before; and even, after some experience, to foresee the headache at the time of the hilarity: but life, to the casual eye of the average man, hides in the main the secrets of its series, and betrays only an illogical succession of events. Minds cruder than the average see only a jumble of happenings in the life they look upon, and group them, if at all, by propinquity in time, rather than by any deeper law of relation. Such a mind had Dame Quickly, the loquacious Hostess in Shakespeare's "Henry IV." Consider the famous speech in which she accuses Falstaff of breach of promise to marry her: —

"Thou didst swear to me upon a parcel-gilt goblet, sitting in my Dolphin-chamber, at the round table, by a sea-coal fire, upon Wednesday in Wheeson week, when the prince broke thy head for liking his father to a singing-man of Windsor, thou didst swear to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me and make me my lady thy wife. Canst thou deny it? Did not goodwife Keech, the butcher's wife, come in then and call me gossip

Quickly? coming in to borrow a mess of vinegar; telling us she had a good dish of prawns; whereby thou didst desire to eat some; whereby I told thee they were ill for a green wound? And didst thou not, when she was gone down stairs, desire me to be no more so familiarity with such poor people; saying that ere long they should call me madam? And didst thou not kiss me and bid me fetch thee thirty shillings? I put thee now to thy book-oath: deny it, if thou canst."

There are, of course, many deficiencies in Dame Quickly's mental make-up; but the one for us to notice here is her utter lack of the narrative sense. She would never be able to tell a story: because, in the first place, she could not select from a muddle of events those which bore an intelligible relation to one another, and in the second place, she could not arrange them logically instead of chronologically. She has no sense of series. And although Dame Quickly's mind is an exaggeration of the type it represents, the type, in less exaggerated form, is very common; and everybody will agree that the average man, who has never taken pains to train himself in narrative, is not able in his ordinary conversation to tell with ease a logically connected story.

The better sort of narrative sense is not merely an abstract intellectual understanding of the relation of cause and effect subsisting between events often disparate in time; it is, rather, a concrete feeling of the relation. It is an intuitive feeling; and, being such, it is possessed instinctively by certain minds. There are people in the world who are natural born story-tellers; all of us have met with them in actual life: and to this class belong the story-telling giants, like Sir Walter Scott, Victor Hugo, Dumas père, Stevenson, and Mr. Kipling. Narrative

is natural to their minds. They sense events in series; and a series once started in their imagination propels itself with hurrying progression. Some novelists, like Wilkie Collins, have nothing else to recommend them but this native sense of narrative; but it is a gift that is not to be despised. Authors with something important to say about life have need of it, in order that the process of reading their fiction may be, in Stevenson's phrase, "absorbing and voluptuous." In the great story-tellers, there is a sort of self-enjoyment in the exercise of the sense of narrative; and this, by sheer contagion, communicates enjoyment to the reader. Perhaps it may be called (by analogy with the familiar phrase, "the joy of living") the joy of telling tales. The joy of telling tales which shines through "Treasure Island" is perhaps the main reason for the continued popularity of the story. The author is having such a good time in telling his tale that he gives us necessarily a good time in reading it.

But many of the novelists who have had great things to say about human life have been singularly deficient in this native sense of narrative. George Eliot and Anthony Trollope, for example, almost never evidence the joy of telling tales. George Eliot's natural habit of mind was abstract rather than concrete; she was born an essayist. But, largely through the influence of George Henry Lewes, she deliberately decided that fiction was the most effective medium for expressing her philosophy of life. Thereafter she strove earnestly to develop that sense of narrative which, at the outset, was largely lacking in her mind. To many readers who are not without appreciation of the importance and profundity of her understanding of human nature, her stories are wearisome and unalluring, because she told them with labor, not with ease. She

does not seem to have had a good time with them, as Stevenson had with "Treasure Island," a story in other ways of comparative unimportance. And surely it is not frivolous to state that the most profound and serious of thoughts are communicated best when they are communicated with the greatest interest.

It could hardly be hoped that a person entirely devoid of the narrative sense should acquire it by any amount of labor; but nearly every one possesses it in at least a rudimentary degree, and any one possessing it at all may develop it by exercise. A simple and common-sensible exercise is to seize hold of some event that happens in our daily lives, and then think back over all the antecedent events we can remember, until we discern which ones among them stand in a causal relation to the event we are considering. Next, it will be well to look forward and imagine the sort of events which will logically carry on the series. The great generals of history have won their most signal victories by an exercise of the narrative sense. Holding at the moment of planning a campaign the past and present terms of a logical series of events, they have imagined forward and foreseen the probable progression of the series. This may perhaps explain why the great commanders, like Cæsar and Grant, have written such able narrative when they have turned to literature.

The young author who is trying to develop his narrative sense may find unending exercise in the endeavor to ferret out the various series of events which lie entangled in the confused and apparently unrelated successions of incidents which pass before his observation. When he sees something happen in the street, he will not be satisfied, like the casual looker-on, merely with that solitary *happening;* he will try to find out what other happenings

led up to it, and again what other happenings must logically follow from it. When he sees an interesting person in a street-car, he will wonder where that person has come from and whither he is going, what he has just done and what he is about to do; he will look before and after, and pine for what is not. This exercise is in itself interesting; and if the result of it be written down, the young author will gain experience in expression at the same time that he is developing his sense of narrative.

It remains for us now to consider philosophically the significance of the word *event*. Every event has three elements: the thing that is done, the agents that do it, and the circumstances of time and place under which it is done; or, to say the matter in three words, — action, actors, and setting. Only when all three elements conspire can something happen. Life suggests to the mind of a contemplative observer many possible events which remain unrealized because only one or two of the necessary three elements are present, — events that are waiting, like unborn children on the other side of Lethe, until the necessary conditions shall call them into being. We observe a man who could do a great thing of a certain sort if only that sort of thing were demanded to be done at the time and in the place in which he loiters wasted. We grow aware of a great thing longing to be done, when there is no one present who is capable of doing it. We behold conditions of place and time entirely fitted for a certain sort of happening; but nothing happens, because the necessary people are away. "Never the time and the place and the loved one all together!" sang Robert Browning; and then he dreamed upon an event which was waiting to be born, — waiting for the imagined meeting and marriage of its elements.

It is the function of the master of creative narrative to call events into being. He does this by assembling and marrying the elements without which events cannot occur. Granted the conception of a character who is capable of doing certain things, he finds things of that sort for the character to do; granted a sense of certain things longing to be done, he finds people who will do them; or granted the time and the place that seem expectant of a certain sort of happening, he finds the agents proper to the setting. There is a conversation of Stevenson's, covering this point, which has been often quoted. His biographer, Mr. Graham Balfour, tells us: "Either on that day or about that time I remember very distinctly his saying to me: 'There are, so far as I know, three ways, and three ways only, of writing a story. You may take a plot and fit characters to it, or you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it, or lastly — you must bear with me while I try to make this clear' — (here he made a gesture with his hand as if he were trying to shape something and give it outline and form) — 'you may take a certain atmosphere and get action and persons to express it and realize it. I'll give you an example — "The Merry Men." There I began with the feeling of one of those islands on the west coast of Scotland, and I gradually developed the story to express the sentiment with which the coast affected me.'"

In other words, starting with any one of the three elements — action, actors, or setting — the writer of narrative may create events by imagining the other two. Comparatively speaking, there have been very few stories, like "The Merry Men," in which the author has started out from a sense of setting; and nearly all of them have *been written* recently. The feeling for setting as the

initial element in narrative hardly dates back further than the nineteenth century. We may therefore best consider it in a later and more special chapter, and devote our attention for the present to the two methods of creating narrative that have been most often used — that in which the author has started with the element of action, and that in which he has started with the element of character.

Very few of the great masters of narrative have, like Honoré de Balzac, employed both one and the other method with equal success: nearly all of them have shown an habitual mental predilection for the one or for the other. The elder Dumas, for example, habitually devised a scheme of action and then selected characters to fit into his plot; and Mr. George Meredith has habitually created characters and then devised the elements of action necessary to exhibit and develop them. Readers, like the novelists themselves, usually feel a predilection for one method rather than the other; but surely each method is natural and reasonable, and it would be unjudicious for the critic to exalt either of them at the expense of the other. There is plenty of material in life to allure a mind of either habit. Certain things that are done are in themselves so interesting that it matters comparatively little who is doing them; and certain characters are in themselves so interesting that it matters comparatively little what they do. To conceive a potent train of action and thereby foreordain the nature of such characters as will accomplish it, or to conceive characters pregnant with potentiality for certain sorts of deeds and thereby foreordain a train of action, — either is a legitimate method for planning out a narrative. That method is best for any author which is most natural for him; he will

succeed best working in his own way; and that critic is not catholic who states that either the narrative of action or the narrative of character is a better type of work than the other. The truth of human life may be told equally well by those who sense primarily its element of action and by those who sense primarily its element of character; for both elements must finally appear commingled in any story that is real.

The critic may, however, make a philosophical distinction between the two methods, in order to lead to a better understanding of them both. The writers who sense life primarily as action may be said to work from the outside in; and those who sense it primarily as character may be said to work from the inside out. The first method requires the more objective, and the second the more subjective, consciousness of life. Of the two, the objective consciousness of life is (at its weakest) more elementary and (at its strongest) more elemental than the subjective.

Stevenson, in his "Gossip on Romance," has eloquently voiced the potency of an objective sense of action as the initial factor in the development of a narrative. He is speaking of the spell cast over him by certain books he read in boyhood. "For my part," he says, "I liked a story to begin with an old wayside inn where, 'towards the close of the year 17—,' several gentlemen in three-cocked hats were playing bowls. A friend of mine preferred the Malabar coast in a storm, with a ship beating to windward, and a scowling fellow of Herculean proportions striding along the beach; he, to be sure, was a pirate. This was further afield than my home-keeping fancy loved to travel, and designed altogether for a larger canvas than the tales that I affected. Give me a highwayman and I was full to the brim; a Jacobite would do, but the high-

wayman was my favorite dish. I can still hear that merry clatter of the hoofs along the moonlit lane; night and the coming of day are still related in my mind with the doings of John Rann or Jerry Abershaw; and the words 'post-chaise,' the 'great north road,' 'ostler,' and 'nag' still sound in my ears like poetry. One and all, at least, and each with his particular fancy, we read story-books in childhood, not for eloquence or character or thought, but for some quality of the brute incident." — For the writer who works from the outside in, it is entirely possible to develop from "some quality of the brute incident" a narrative that shall be not only stirring in its propulsion of events but also profound in its significance of elemental truth.

The method of working from the inside out — of using a subjective sense of character as the initial factor in the development of a narrative — is wonderfully exemplified in the work of Ivan Turgénieff; and the method is very clearly explained in Mr. Henry James' intimate essay on the great Russian master. Mr. James remarks: "The germ of a story, with him, was never an affair of plot — that was the last thing he thought of: it was the representation of certain persons. The first form in which a tale appeared to him was as the figure of an individual, or a combination of individuals, whom he wished to see in action, being sure that such people must do something very special and interesting. They stood before him definite, vivid, and he wished to know, and to show, as much as possible of their nature. The first thing was to make clear to himself what he did know, to begin with; and to this end he wrote out a sort of biography of each of his characters, and everything that they had done and that had happened to them up to the opening of the story.

He had their *dossier*, as the French say, and as the police has of that of every conspicuous criminal. With this material in his hand he was able to proceed; the story all lay in the question, What shall I make them do? He always made them do things that showed them completely; but, as he said, the defect of his manner and the reproach that was made him was his want of 'architecture' — in other words, of composition. The great thing, of course, is to have architecture as well as precious material, as Walter Scott had them, as Balzac had them. If one reads Turgénieff's stories with the knowledge that they were composed — or rather that they came into being — in this way, one can trace the process in every line. Story, in the conventional sense of the word — a fable constructed, like Wordsworth's phantom, 'to startle and waylay' — there is as little as possible. The thing consists of the motions of a group of selected creatures, which are not the result of a preconceived action, but a consequence of the qualities of the actors." — And yet, for the writer who, like Turgénieff, works from the inside out, it is entirely possible to develop from "the qualities of the actors" a train of action that shall be as stirring as it is significant.

The main principle of narrative to bear in mind is that action alone, or character alone, is not its proper subject-matter. The purpose of narrative is to represent events; and an event occurs only when both character and action, with contributory setting, are assembled and commingled. Indeed, in the greatest and most significant events, it is impossible to decide whether the actor or the action has the upper hand; it is impossible, in regarding such events, for the imagination to conceive what is done and who is *doing* it as elements divorced. A novelist who has started

out with either element and has afterward evoked the other may arrive by imagination at this final complete sense of an event. The best narratives of action and of character are indistinguishable, one from another, in their ultimate result: they differ only in their origin: and the author who aspires to a mastery of narrative should remember that, in narrative at its best, character and action and even setting are one and inseparable.

For the conveniences of study, however, it is well to examine the elements of narrative one by one; and we shall therefore devote three separate chapters to a technical consideration of plot, and characters, and setting.

CHAPTER IV

PLOT

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, in his spirited essay entitled "A Humble Remonstrance," has given very valuable advice to the writer of narrative. In concluding his remarks he says, "And as the root of the whole matter, let him bear in mind that his novel is not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude; but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity. For although, in great men, working upon great motives, what we observe and admire is often their complexity, yet underneath appearances the truth remains unchanged: that simplification was their method, and that simplicity is their excellence." Indeed, as we have already noted in passing, simplification is the method of every art. Every artist, in his own way, simplifies life: first by selecting essentials from the helter-skelter of details that life presents to him, and then by arranging these essentials in accordance with a pattern. And we have noted also that the method of the artist in narrative is to select events which bear an essential logical relation to each other and then to arrange them along the lines of a pattern of causation.

Of course the prime structural necessity in narrative, as indeed in every method of discourse, is unity. Unity in any work of art can be attained only by a definite decision of the artist as to what he is trying to accomplish, *and by* a rigorous focus of attention on his purpose to

accomplish it, — a focus of attention so rigorous as to exclude consideration of any matter which does not contribute, directly or indirectly, to the furtherance of his aim. The purpose of the artist in narrative is to represent a series of events — wherein each event stands in a causal relation, direct or indirect, to its logical predecessor and its logical successor in the series. Obviously the only way to attain unity of narrative is to exclude consideration of any event which does not, directly or indirectly, contribute to the progress of the series. For this reason, Stevenson states in his advice to the young writer, from which we have already quoted: "Let him choose a motive, whether of character or passion: carefully construct his plot so that every incident is an illustration of the motive, and every property employed shall bear to it a near relation of congruity or contrast; . . . and allow neither himself in the narrative, nor any character in the course of the dialogue, to utter one sentence that is not part and parcel of the business of the story or the discussion of the problem involved. Let him not regret if this shortens his book; it will be better so; for to add irrelevant matter is not to lengthen but to bury. Let him not mind if he miss a thousand qualities, so that he keeps unflaggingly in pursuit of the one he has chosen." And earlier in the same essay, he says of the novel: "For the welter of impressions, all forcible but all discreet, which life presents, it substitutes a certain artificial series of impressions, all indeed most feebly represented, but all aiming at the same effect, all eloquent of the same idea, all chiming together like consonant notes in music or like the graduated tints in a good picture. From all its chapters, from all its pages, from all its sentences, the well-written novel echoes and re-echoes its one creative and controlling thought; to this

must every incident and character contribute; the style must have been pitched in unison with this; and if there is anywhere a word that looks another way, the book would be stronger, clearer, and (I had almost said) fuller without it."

The only way in which the writer of narrative may attain the unity that Stevenson has so eloquently pleaded for is to decide upon a definite objective point, to bear in mind constantly the culmination of his series of events, and to value the successive details of his material only in so far as they contribute, directly or indirectly, to the progress of the series toward that culmination. To say the thing more simply, he must see the end of his story from the beginning and must give the reader always a sense of rigorous movement toward that end. His narrative, as a matter of construction, must be finished, before, as a matter of writing, it is begun. He must know as definitely as possible all that is to happen and all that is not to happen in his story before he ventures to represent in words the very first of his events. He must not, as some beginners try to do, attempt to make his story up as he goes along; for unless he holds the culmination of his series constantly in mind, he will not be able to decide whether any event that suggests itself during the progress of his composition does or does not form a logical factor in the series.

The preliminary process of construction may be accomplished in either of two ways. Authors with synthetic minds will more naturally reason from causes to effects; and authors with analytic minds will more naturally reason from effects to causes. The former will construct forward through time, the latter backward. Standing at the outset of a narrative, it is possible to imagine forward *along a series of* events until the logical culmination is

divined; or standing at the culmination, it is possible to imagine backward along the series to its far-away beginnings. Thackeray apparently constructed in the former manner; Guy de Maupassant apparently constructed in the latter. The latter method — the method of building backward from the culmination — is perhaps more efficacious toward the conservation of the strictest unity. It seems on the whole a little easier to exclude the extraneous in thinking from effects to causes than in thinking from causes to effects, because analysis is a stricter and more focused mood of mind than synthesis.

But in whichever way the process of construction be accomplished, the best stories are always built before they are written; and that is the reason why, in reading them, we feel at every point that we are getting somewhere, and that the author is leading us step by step toward a definite culmination. Although, as is usually the case, we cannot, even midway through the story, foresee what the culmination is to be, we feel a certain reassurance in the knowledge that the author has foreseen it from the start. This feeling is one of the main sources of interest in reading narrative. In looking on at life itself, we are baffled by a muddle of events leading everywhither; their succession is chaotic and lacking in design; they are not marshaled and processional; and we have an uncomfortable feeling that no mind but that of God can foresee their veiled and hidden culminations. But in reading a narrative arrangement of life, we have a comfortable sense of order, which comes of our knowledge that the author knows beforehand whither the events are tending and can make us understand the sequence of causation through which they are moving to their ultimate result. He makes life more interesting by making

it more intelligible; and he does this mainly by his power of construction.

The simplest of all structures for a narrative is a straightway arrangement of events along a single strand of causation. In such a narrative, the first event is the direct cause of the second, the second of the third, the third of the fourth, and so on to the culmination of the series. This very simple structure is exhibited in many of the tales which have come down to us from early centuries. It is frequently employed in the "Gesta Romanorum," and scarcely less frequently in the "Decameron" of Boccaccio. It has the advantage of being completely logical and entirely direct. But we feel, in reading stories so constructed, that the method of simplification has been carried too far, and that simplicity has therefore ceased to be an excellence. Such a story is in this way misrepresentative of life:—it fails utterly to suggest "the welter of impressions which life presents," the sudden kaleidoscopic shifts of actual life from one series of events to another, and the consequent intricacy and apparent chaos of life's successive happenings. The structure is too straightforward, too direct, too unwavering and unhesitant.

The simplest way to introduce the element of hesitance and wavering, and thereby make the story more truly suggestive of the intricate variety of life, is to interrupt the series by the introduction of events whose apparent tendency is to hinder its progress, and in this way emphasize the ultimate triumph of the series in attaining its predestined culmination. Such events are not extraneous; because, although they tend directly to dispute the progress of the series, they tend also indirectly to further it through their failure to arrest it. The events in any skilfully *selected narrative* may, therefore, be divided into two

classes: events direct or positive, and events indirect or negative. By a direct, or positive, event is meant one whose immediate tendency is to aid the progress of the series toward its predetermined objective point; and by an indirect, or negative, event is meant one whose immediate tendency is to thwart this predetermined outcome. It would be an easy matter, for example, in examining "Pilgrim's Progress," to class as positive those events which directly further the advance of Christian toward the Celestial City, and to class as negative those events whose immediate tendency is to turn him aside from the straight and narrow path. And yet both classes of events, positive and negative, make up really only a single series; because the negative events are conquered one by one by the preponderant power of the positive events, and contribute therefore indirectly, through their failure, to the ultimate attainment of the culmination.

When a straightway arrangement of positive events along a single strand of causation is varied and emphasized in this way by the admission of negative events, whose tendency is to thwart the progress of the series, the structure may be made very suggestive of that conflict of forces which we feel to be ever present in actual life. This structure is exhibited, for example, in Hawthorne's little tale of "David Swan." The point of the story is that nothing happens to David; the interest of the story lies in the events that almost happen to him. The young man falls asleep at noon-time under the shade of a clump of maples which cluster around a spring beside the highroad. Three people, or sets of people, observe him in his sleep. The first would confer upon him Wealth, the second Love, the third Death, if he should waken at the moment. But David Swan sleeps deeply;

the people pass on; and all that almost happened to him subsides forever to the region of the might-have-been.

A simple series of this sort, wherein the events proceed, now directly, now indirectly, along a single logical line, may be succeeded by another simple series of the same sort, which in turn may be succeeded by a third, and so on indefinitely. In this way is constructed the type of story known as picaresque, because in Spain, where the type was first developed, the hero was usually a *picaro*, or rogue. The narrative expedient in such stories is merely to select a hero capable of adventure, to fling him loose into the roaring and tremendous world, and to let things happen to him one after another. The most widely known example of the type is not a Spanish story, but a French, — the "Gil Blas" of Alain René Le Sage. As soon as Gil Blas arrives at the culmination of one series of adventures, the author starts him on another. Each series is complete in itself and distinct from all the rest; and the structure of the whole book may be likened, in a homely figure, to a string of sausages. The relation between the different sections of the story is not organic; they are merely tied together by the continuance of the same central character from one to another. Any one of the sections might be discarded without detriment to the others; and the order of them might be rearranged. Plays, as well as novels, have been constructed in this inorganic way, — for example, Molière's "L'Etourdi" and "Les Facheux." If the actors, in performing either of these plays, should omit one or two units of the sausage-string of incidents, the audience would not become aware of any gap in structure. Yet a story built in this straightforward and successive way may give a vast impression

of the shifting maze of life. Mr. Kipling's "Kim," which is picaresque in structure, shows us nearly every aspect of the labyrinthine life of India. He selects a healthy and normal, but not a clever, boy, and allows all India to happen to him. The book is without beginning and without end; but its very lack of neatness and compactness of plan contributes to the general impression it gives of India's immensity.

But a simple series of events arranged along a single strand of causation, or a succession of several series of this kind strung along one after the other, may not properly be called a plot. The word *plot* signifies a weaving together; and a weaving together presupposes the coexistence of more than one strand. The simplest form of plot, properly so called, is a weaving together of two distinct series of events; and the simplest way of weaving them together is by so devising them that, though they may be widely separate at their beginnings, they progress, each in its own way, toward a common culmination, — a single momentous event which stands therefore at the apex of each series. This event is the knot which ties together the two strands of causation. Thus, in "Silas Marner," the culminating event, which is the redemption of Marner from a misanthropic aloofness from life, through the influence of Eppie, a child in need of love, is led up to by two distinct series of events, of which it forms the knot. The one series, which concerns itself with Marner, may be traced back to the unmerited wrong which he suffered in his youth; and the other series, which concerns itself with Eppie, may be traced back to the clandestine marriage of Eppie's father, Godfrey Cass. The initial event of one series has no immediate logical relation to the initial event of the other; but each series,

as it progresses, approaches nearer and nearer to the other, until they meet and blend.

A type of plot more elaborate than this may be devised by leading up to the culmination along three or more distinct lines of causation, instead of merely two. In the "Tale of Two Cities," Sydney Carton's voluntary death upon the scaffold stands at the apex of several series of events. And a plot may be still further complicated by tying the strands together at other points beside the culmination. In "The Merchant of Venice," the two chief series of events are firmly knotted in the trial scene, when Shylock is circumvented by Portia; but they are also tied together, though less firmly, at the very outset of the play, when Antonio borrows from Shylock the money which makes it possible for Bassanio to woo and win the Lady of Belmont. Furthermore, any event in one of the main strands of causation may stand at the culmination of a minor strand, and thus may form a little knot in the general network of the plot. In the same play, the minor strand of the elopement of Lorenzo and Jessica attains its culmination in a scene which stands only midway along the progress of the two main strands, that of the bond and that of the caskets, toward their common result in the defeat of Shylock.

But however intricately woven a plot may be, and however many minor knots may tie together the various strands which enter into it, there is almost always one point of greatest complication, one big knot which ties together all the strands at once, and stands as the common culmination of all the series, major and minor. The story concerns itself chiefly with telling the reader how the major knot came to be tied; but in a plot of any complexity, the reader naturally desires to be told how the

knot became untied again. Therefore this point of greatest complication, this culmination of all the strands of causation which are woven in the plot, this objective point of the entire narrative, is seldom set at the very end of a story, but usually at a point about three quarters of the way from the beginning to the end. The first three quarters of the story, speaking roughly, exhibit the antecedent causes of the major knot; and the last quarter of the story exhibits its subsequent effects. A plot, therefore, in its general aspects, may be figured as a complication followed by an explication, a tying followed by an untying, or (to say the same thing in French words which are perhaps more connotative) a *nouement* followed by a *dénouement*. The events in the *dénouement* bear a closer logical relation to each other than the events in the *nouement*, because all of them have a common cause in the major knot, whereas the major knot is the ultimate effect of several distinct series of causes which were quite separate one from another at the time when the *nouement* was begun. For this reason the *dénouement* shows usually a more hurried movement than the *nouement*, — one event treading on another's heels.

Undoubtedly it was this threefold aspect of a plot — 1. The Complication; 2. The Major Knot; 3. The Explication — which Aristotle had in mind when he stated that every story must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. These words were not intended to connote a quantitative equality. What Aristotle called the "middle" may, in a modern novel, be stated in a single page, and is much more likely to stand near the close of the book than at the center. But everything that comes after it, in what Aristotle called the "end," should be an effect of which it is the cause; and everything that comes before it,

in what Aristotle called the "beginning," should be, directly or indirectly, a cause of which it is the effect. Only under these conditions will the plot be, as Aristotle said it should be, an organic whole. Only in this way can it conform to the principle of unity, which is the first principle of all artistic endeavor.

Bearing the principle of unity ever in his mind, Stevenson, in a phrase omitted for the moment in one of the quotations from "A Humble Remonstrance" set forth at the beginning of this chapter, advised the fiction-writer to "avoid a sub-plot, unless, as sometimes in Shakespeare, the sub-plot be a reversion or complement of the main intrigue." It seems safe to state that a sub-plot is of use in a novel only for the purpose of tying minor knots in the leading strands of causation, and should be discarded unless it serves that purpose. There is no reason, however, why a novel should not tell at once several stories of equal importance, provided that these stories be deftly interlinked, as in that masterpiece of plotting, "Our Mutual Friend." In this novel, the chief expedient which Dickens has employed to bind his different stories together is to make the same person an actor in more than one of them, so that a particular event that happens to him may be at the same time a factor in both one and the other series of events. Through the skilful use of this expedient, Dickens has contrived to give his novel unity of plot, in spite of the diversity of its narrative elements. But on the other hand, in "Middlemarch," George Eliot has told three stories instead of one. She has failed to make her plot an organic whole by deftly interweaving the three strands which she has spun. And therefore this monumental novel, so great in other ways, is faulty *in structure,* because it violates the principle of unity.

According to the extent of complication in the plot, novels may be grouped into two classes, — the discursive and the compacted. Thackeray wrote novels of the former type, Hawthorne of the latter. In "Vanity Fair" there are over half a hundred characters; in "The Scarlet Letter" there are three, or possibly four. The discursive novel gives a more extensive, and the compacted novel a more intensive, view of life. English authors for the most part have tended toward the discursive type, and Continental authors toward the compacted. The latter type demands a finer and a firmer art, the former a broader and more catholic outlook on the world.

The distinction between the two types depends chiefly upon how much or how little of his entire story the author chooses to tell. In actual life, as was stated in a former chapter, there are no very ends; and it may now be added that also there are no absolute beginnings. Any event that happens is, in Whitman's words, "an acme of things accomplished" and "an encloser of things to be"; and in thinking back along its causes or forward along its effects, we may continue the series until our thought loses itself in an eternity. In any narrative, therefore, we are doomed to begin and end in mid-career; and the question is merely how extended a section of the entire imaginable and unimaginable series we shall choose to represent to the reader. For instance, it would be a very simple matter to trace the composition of Rossetti's "House of Life" back along a causal series to the birth of a boy in Arezzo in 1304; for it is hardly likely that Rossetti would have written a cycle of love sonnets if many other poets, such as Shakespeare and Ronsard, had not done so before him; and Shakespeare and Ronsard, as Mr. Sidney Lee has proved, were literary legatees of Petrarch, the aforesaid

native of Arezzo. And yet, if we were to tell the story of how Rossetti's sonnets came to be composed, it is doubtful if we should go further back in time than the occasion when his friend Deverell introduced him to the beautiful daughter of a Sheffield cutler who became the immediate inspiration of his poetry of love.

Dickens, in many novels, of which "David Copperfield" may be taken as an example, has chosen to tell the entire life-story of his hero from birth up to maturity. But other novelists, like Mr. Meredith in "The Egoist," have chosen to represent events that pass, for the most part, in one place, and in an exceedingly short stretch of time. It is by no means certain that Mr. Meredith does not know as much about the boyhood and youth of Sir Willoughby Patterne as Dickens knew about the early years of David Copperfield; but he has chosen to compact his novel by presenting only a brief series of events which exhibit his hero at maturity. Surely Turgénieff, after writing out that *dossier* of each of his characters to which Mr. Henry James referred, must have known a great many events in their lives which he chose to omit from his finished novel. It is interesting to imagine the sort of plot that George Eliot would have built out of the materials of "The Scarlet Letter." Probably she would have begun the narrative in England at the time when Hester was a young girl. She would have set forth the meeting of Hester and Chillingworth and would have analyzed the causes culminating in their marriage. Then she would have taken the couple overseas to the colony of Massachusetts. Here Hester would have met Arthur Dimmesdale; and George Eliot would have expended all her powers as an analyist of life in tracing the sweet thoughts and imperious *desires that led* the lovers to the dolorous pass. The fall

of Hester would have been the major knot in George Eliot's entire narrative. It would have stood at the culmination of the *nouement* of her plot: the subsequent events would have been merely steps in the *dénouement.* Yet the fall of Hester was already a thing of the past at the outset of the story that Hawthorne chose to represent. He was interested only in the after-effects of Hester's sin upon herself and her lover and her husband. The major knot, or culmination, of his plot was therefore the revelation of the scarlet letter, — a scene which would have been only an incident in George Eliot's *dénouement.* It will be seen from this that any story which is extended in its implications may offer a novelist materials for any one of several plot-structures, according to whichever section of the entire story happens most to interest his mind.

It will be seen, also, that much of the entire story must, in any case, remain unwritten. A plot is not only, as Stevenson stated, a simplification of life; it is also a further simplification of the train of events which, in simplifying life, the novelist has first imagined. The entire story, with all its implications, is selected from life; and the plot is then selected from the entire story. Often a novelist may suggest as much through deliberately omitting from his plot certain events in his imagined story as he could suggest by representing them. Perhaps the most powerful character in Mr. Meredith's "Evan Harrington" is the great Mel, whose death is announced in the very first sentence of the novel. Hawthorne, in "The Marble Faun," never clears away the mystery of Miriam's shadowy pursuer, nor tells us what became of Hilda when she disappeared for a time from the sight and knowledge of her friends.

After the novelist has selected from his entire story the

materials he means to represent, and has patterned these materials into a plot, he enjoys considerable liberty in regard to the point at which he may commence his narrative. He may begin at the beginning of one or another of his main strands of causation, as Scott usually does; or he may adopt the Homeric device, commended by Horace, of plunging into the midst of his plot and working his way back only afterward to its beginning. In the first chapter of "Pendennis," the hero is seventeen years old; the second chapter narrates the marriage of his father and mother, and his own birth and boyhood; and at the outset of the third chapter he is only sixteen years of age.

It is obvious that, so long as the novelist represents his events in logical sequence, it is not at all necessary that he should present them in chronological succession. Stories may be told backward through time as well as forward. Thackeray often begins a chapter with an event that happened one day, and ends it with an event that happened several days before; he works his way backward from effects to causes, instead of forward from causes to effects. In carrying on a plot which is woven out of several strands, it is hardly ever possible to represent events in uninterrupted chronological succession, even when the author consistently works forward from causes to effects; for after he has pursued one strand of his plot to a certain point in time, he is obliged to turn backward several days or weeks, or possibly a longer period, to pick up another strand and carry it forward to the same point in time at which he left the first. Retrogression in time, therefore, is frequently not only permissible but necessary. But it is only common-sensible to state that chronological sequence should be sacrificed merely for *the sake of* making clear the logical relation of events;

and whenever juggling with chronology tends to obscure instead of clarify that logical relation, it is evidence of an error of judgment on the part of the narrator. Turgénieff is often guilty of this error of judgment. He has a disconcerting habit of bringing a new character into the scene which stands for the moment before the eye of the reader, and then turning the narrative backward several years in order to recount the past life of the newcomer. Frequently, before this parenthetic recital is completed, the reader has forgotten the scene from which the author turned to the digression.

In most plots, as has been stated, the *nouement* is more significant than the *dénouement*, and the causes leading to the tying of the major knot are more interesting than the effects traced during the process of untying it. This is the reason why the culmination is usually set well along toward the conclusion of the story. Sometimes even, when the major knot has been tied with a Gordian intricacy, the author sets it at the very end of his narrative, and suddenly cuts it instead of carefully untying it. But there is no absolutely necessary reason why it should stand at the end, or, as is more frequently the case, at a point about three quarters through the story. It may even be set at the very beginning; and the narrative may concern itself entirely with an elaborate *dénouement*. This is the case, for example, in the detective story, where a very intricate knot is assumed at the outset, and the narrative proceeds to exhibit the prowess of the detective-hero in untying it.

A well-constructed plot, like any other sort of well-articulated pattern, is interesting in itself; and certain novels and short-stories, like Wilkie Collins' "Moonstone" and Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue," main-

tain their interest almost through the element of plot alone. But since the purpose of fiction is to represent reality, a story will fail of the highest effect unless the people acting in its pattern of events produce upon the reader the illusion of living human beings. We must therefore turn our attention next to a study of the element of character.

CHAPTER V

CHARACTERS

BEFORE we proceed to study the technical methods of delineating characters, we must ask ourselves what constitutes a character worth delineating. A novelist is, to speak figuratively, the social sponsor for his own fictitious characters; and he is guilty of a social indiscretion, as it were, if he asks his readers to meet fictitious people whom it is neither of value nor of interest to know. Since he aims to make his readers intimate with his characters, he must first of all be careful that his characters are worth knowing intimately. Most of us, in actual life, are accustomed to distinguish people who are worth our while from people who are not; and those of us who live advisedly are accustomed to shield ourselves from people who cannot, by the mere fact of what they are, repay us for the expenditure of time and energy we should have to make to get to know them. And whenever a friend of ours asks us deliberately to meet another friend of his, we take it for granted that our friend has reasons for believing that the acquaintanceship will be of benefit or of interest to both. Now the novelist stands in the position of a friend who asks us to meet certain people whom he knows; and he runs the risk of our losing faith in his judgment unless we find his people worth our while. By the mere fact that we bother to read a novel, thus expending time which might otherwise be passed in company with actual people, we are going out of our way to

meet the characters to whom the novelist wishes to introduce us. He therefore owes us an assurance that they shall be even more worth our while than the average actual person. This is not to say that they should necessarily be better; they may, of course, be worse: but they should be more clearly significant of certain interesting elements of human nature, more thoroughly representative of certain phases of human life which it is well for us to learn and know.

In deciding on the sort of characters that will be worth his readers' while, the novelist must of course be influenced by the nature of the audience he is writing for. The characters of "Little Women" may be worth the while of children; and it is not an adverse criticism of Louisa M. Alcott to say that they are not worth the while of mature men and women. Similarly, it is not an adverse criticism of certain Continental novelists to say that their characters are decidedly unfit companions for adolescent girls. Our judgment of the characters in a novel should be conditioned always by our sense of the sort of readers to whom the novel is addressed. Mr. Henry James, in his later years, has written for the super-civilized; and his characters should be judged by different standards than the pirates of "Treasure Island," — a story which was written for boys, both young and old. One reader may be bored by pirates, another by super-subtle cosmopolitans; and each reader has the privilege of avoiding the society of the characters that weary him.

But the very greatest characters of fiction are worth everybody's while; and surely the masters need have felt no hesitancy in asking any one to meet Sancho Panza, Robinson Crusoe, Henry Esmond, Jean Valjean, or *Terence Mulvaney*. In fact, the most amazing thing

about a great fictitious figure is the multitude of very different people that the character is capable of interesting. Many times we willingly absent ourselves from actual society to pass an evening in the company of a fictitious personage of a class with which we never associate in actual life. Perhaps in the actual world we would never bother to converse with illiterate provincial people; and yet we may not feel it a waste of time and energy to meet them in the pages of "Middlemarch." For my own part, I have always, in actual life, avoided meeting the sort of people that appear in Thackeray's "Vanity Fair"; and yet I find it not only interesting but profitable to associate with them through the entire extent of a rather lengthy novel. Why is it that a reader, who, although he has crossed the ocean many times, has never cared to enter the engine-room of a liner, is yet willing enough to meet on intimate terms Mr. Kipling's engineer, Mac Andrew? And why is it that ladies who, in actual society, are fastidious of their acquaintanceship, should yet associate throughout a novel with the Sapho of Daudet? What is the reason why these fictitious characters should seem, for nearly every reader, more worth while than the very same sort of people in actual life?

The reason is that great fictitious characters are typical of their class, to an extent rarely to be noticed in any actual member of the class they typify. They "contain multitudes," to borrow Whitman's phrase. All idealistic visionaries are typified in Don Quixote, all misers in Harpagon, all hypocrites in Tartufe, all egoists in Sir Willoughby Patterne, all clever tricksy women in Becky Sharp, all sentimentalists in Mr. Barrie's Tommy. But the average actual man is not of sufficient magnitude to contain a multitude of others; he is comparatively lacking

in typical traits; he is not, to such a great extent, illustrative of life, because only in a small measure is he representative of his class. There are, of course, in actual life, certain people of unusual magnitude who justify Emerson's title of "Representative Men." Benjamin Franklin, for example, is such a man. He is the only actual person entirely typical of eighteenth-century America; and that is the main reason why, as an exhibition of character, his autobiography is just as profitable a book as the master-works of fiction. But men so representative are rare in actual life; and the chief business of fiction is therefore to supply them.

It is mainly by supplying this need for representative men and women that the novelist can make his characters worth the while of every reader. But after he has made them quintessential of a class, he must be careful also to individualize them. Unless he endows them with certain personal traits that distinguish them from all other representatives or members of their class, whether actual or fictitious, he will fail to invest them with the illusion of reality. Every great character of fiction must exhibit, therefore, an intimate combination of typical and individual traits. It is through being typical that the character is true; it is through being individual that the character is convincing.

The reason why most allegorical figures are ineffective is that, although they are typical, they are not at the same time individual. They are abstractly representative of a class; but they are not concretely distinguishable from other representatives or members of the class. We know them, therefore, not as persons but merely as ideas. We feel very little human interest nowadays in reading over *the old* morality plays, whose characters are merely

allegorical abstractions. But in criticising them we must remember that they were designed not so much to be read as to be performed upon the stage; and that the actors who represented their abstract and merely typical characters must necessarily have endowed them with concreteness and with individuality. Though a character in one of these allegorical plays might be called "Everyman," it was one particular man who walked and talked upon the boards; and he evoked sympathy not so much for the type as for the individual. But allegory written to be read is less likely to produce the illusion of reality; and it is only when allegorical characters are virtually conceived as individuals, instead of mere abstractions, that they touch the heart. Christian, in Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" is so conceived. He is entirely representative of seventeenth-century Christianity; in a sense he is all men of Bunyan's time and Bunyan's religion; but he is also one man and one only, and we could never in our thought confuse him with any other character in or out of fiction.

But just as a character may be ineffective through being merely typical, so also a character may be unsignificant through being merely individual. The minor figures in Ben Jonson's Comedies of Humours are mere personifications of exaggerated individual traits. They are caricatures rather than characters. Dickens frequently commits the error of exhibiting figures devoid of representative traits. Tommy Traddles is sharply individualized by the fact that his hair is always standing on end; but he exhibits no essential truth of human nature. Barkis, who is always willin', and Micawber, who is always waiting for something to turn up, are emphatically distinguished from everybody else in or out of fiction; but they

lack the large reality of representative characters. They are individualities instead of individuals. They do not exhibit an agglomeration of many different but consistent traits rendered unified and single by a dominant and informing characteristic, such as ambition in Macbeth, senility in Lear, or irresoluteness in Hamlet. A great fictitious character must be at once generic and specific; it must give concrete expression to an abstract idea; it must be an individualized representation of the typical qualities of a class. It is only figures of this sort that are finally worth while in fiction, — more worth the reader's while than the average actual man.

But there is yet another reason why it is often more valuable for the reader to meet fictitious characters than to meet people of the same class in actual life; and this reason is that during the day or two it takes to read a novel he may review the most significant events of many years, and thus get to know a fictitious character more completely in a brief space of time than he could get to know him, if the character were actual, in several years of continuous acquaintanceship. We meet two sorts of characters in the pages of the novelists, — characters which may be called static, and characters which may be called dynamic. The first remain unchanged throughout the course of the story: the second grow up or down, as the case may be, through the influence of circumstances, of their own wills, or of the wills of other people. The recurrent characters of Mr. Kipling's early tales, such as Mrs. Hauksbee, Strickland, Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Learoyd, are static figures. Although they do different things in different stories, their characters remain always the same. But Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are *dynamic* figures; they grow and change throughout the

novel; they are, each in his own way, bigger and wiser people when we leave them than they were when first we met them. To show a character developing under stress or ripening easily beneath beneficent influences is one of the greatest possibilities of fiction. And to exhibit the gradual disintegration of a character, as George Eliot does in the case of Tito Melema, is to teach us more of the tragedy of life than we might learn in many years of actual experience.

Only after the process of creation is completed, and a character stands living in the mind of the novelist, need he consider the various technical expedients which may be employed to make the reader conscious of the character as a personal presence. These technical expedients are many; but they may all be grouped as phases of one or the other of two contrasted methods of delineating character, which may be called, for convenience, direct and indirect. According to the first method, traits of character are conveyed directly to the reader through some sort of statement by the writer of the story: according to the second method, characteristics are conveyed indirectly to the reader through a necessary inference, on his part, from the narrative itself. In employing the first, or direct, method, the author (either in his own person or in that of some character which he assumes) stands between the reader and the character he is portraying, in the attitude, more or less frankly confessed, of showman or expositor. In employing the second, or indirect, method, the author seeks to obliterate himself as much as possible from the reader's consciousness; and having brought the reader face to face with the character he desires to portray, leaves the reader to make his own acquaintance with the character. The indirect method is of course

more difficult, and, when successfully employed, is more artistic, than the direct method. But seldom is either used to the exclusion of the other; and it would be possible to illustrate by successive quotations from any first-rate novel, like "The Egoist" for example, how the same characteristics are portrayed first by the one and then by the other method.

And each of the two methods shows itself in many different phases. There are several distinct ways of delineating character directly, and also several distinct means of indirect delineation. It is perhaps serviceable for the purposes of study to distinguish them somewhat sharply one from another; but it must always be remembered that the masters of fiction usually employ a commingling of them all, without conscious awareness of any critical distinction between them. Bearing this ever in mind, let us venture on a critical examination of some of the most frequently recurrent phases, first, of the direct, and secondly, of the indirect method.

The most obvious, and at the same time the most elementary, means of direct portrayal is by a deliberate expository statement of the leading traits of the character to be portrayed. Thus, at the outset of "The Vicar of Wakefield," the author, writing in the person of the Vicar, thus expounds the traits of Mrs. Primrose: —

"I was ever of opinion, that the honest man who married and brought up a large family, did more service than he who continued single, and only talked of population. From this motive, I had scarce taken orders a year before I began to think seriously of matrimony, and chose my wife as she did her wedding-gown, not for a fine glossy surface, but such qualities as would wear well. To do *her justice*, she was a good-natured notable woman; and

as for breeding, there were few country ladies who could show more. She could read any English book without much spelling; but for pickling, preserving, and cookery, none could excel her. She prided herself also upon being an excellent contriver in housekeeping; though I could never find that we grew richer with all her contrivances."

This elementary means of portrayal has the obvious advantage of succinctness. The reader is told at once, and with a fair measure of completeness, what he is to think about the character in question. For this reason the expedient is highly serviceable at the outset of a story. So excellent an artist as Stevenson, in the "New Arabian Nights," began each tale in the collection with a paragraph in which he expounded the main traits of the leading character. But the expedient has also several disadvantages. In the first place, being expository, it is not narrative in mood; it savors of the essay rather than the story; and if it be used not at the outset but during the course of a narrative, it halts the progress of the action. In the second place, it is abstract rather than concrete; it does not bring the reader into the presence of a character, but merely into the presence of an explanation; and it leaves the reader in an attitude exactly like that which he holds toward certain actual people, concerning whom he has been told a great deal by their friends, but whom he has never met himself. The whole first chapter of "The Vicar of Wakefield" is a series of little essays on the various members of the Primrose family. Nothing happens in the chapter; the characters never step bodily into view; and we feel at the end that we have heard a great deal of talk about people whom we should like to meet but whom as yet we have not seen.

It is therefore in certain ways more satisfactory to portray character directly through a descriptive, rather than an expository, statement. Thus, in the second chapter of "Martin Chuzzlewit," we are told of Mr. Pecksniff:—

"His very throat was moral. You saw a good-deal of it. You looked over a very low fence of white cravat (whereof no man had ever beheld the tie, for he fastened it behind), and there it lay, a valley between two jutting heights of collar, serene and whiskerless before you. It seemed to say, on the part of Mr. Pecksniff, 'There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen, all is peace, a holy calm pervades me.' So did his hair, just grizzled with an iron-gray, which was all brushed off his forehead, and stood bolt upright, or slightly drooped in kindred action with his heavy eyelids. So did his person, which was sleek though free from corpulency. So did his manner, which was soft and oily. In a word, even his plain black suit, and state of widower, and dangling double eye-glass, all tended to the same purpose, and cried aloud, 'Behold the moral Pecksniff!'"

This statement, being in the main concretely descriptive rather than abstractly expository, brings us face to face with the character at the same time that it tells us what to think of him. And whereas we feel that we have merely heard about Mrs. Primrose, we feel that we have really seen Mr. Pecksniff.

It was the custom of Sir Walter Scott, at the introduction of a character, to furnish the reader with an elaborate set portrayal, partly expository and partly descriptive, of the traits and features of the character; and to allow this initial direct statement to do duty through the remainder of the novel. The trouble with this off-hand

expedient is that the reader inevitably forgets the set statement of the author before the narrative has very far progressed. It is therefore more effective to make a direct portrayal of character, whether expository or descriptive, little by little rather than all in a lump; and to present at any one time to the reader only such traits or features as he needs to be reminded of in order to appreciate the scene before him. Thus, in Mr. Kipling's masterpiece, called "They," we catch this initial glimpse of Miss Florence: —

"The garden door — heavy oak sunk deep in the thickness of the wall — opened further: a woman in a big garden hat set her foot slowly on the time-hollowed stone step and as slowly walked across the turf. I was forming some apology when she lifted up her head and I saw that she was blind.

"'I heard you,' she said. 'Isn't that a motor car?'"

And it is only after five pages of narrative that the writer deems it the proper time to add:—

"She stood looking at me with open blue eyes in which no sight lay, and I saw for the first time that she was beautiful."

The point that a direct statement of characteristics should preferably be delivered to the reader little by little rather than all in a lump is particularly patent when the statement is not external and objective like those already quoted, but internal and subjective. In a certain type of fiction, which is commonly called "the psychological novel," the usual expedient for delineating character is a statement partly narrative and partly expository of what is taking place within the mind of the fictitious person, based upon an analysis of his thoughts and his emotions, at important moments of the story. This

expedient of portraying character by mental analysis is George Eliot's favorite technical device. Here is a typical passage, from "The Mill on the Floss," Chapter V: —

"Maggie soon thought she had been hours in the attic, and it must be tea-time, and they were all having their tea, and not thinking of her. Well, then, she would stay up there and starve herself — hide herself behind the tub, and stay there all night; and then they would all be frightened, and Tom would be sorry. Thus Maggie thought in the pride of her heart, as she crept behind the tub; but presently she began to cry again at the idea that they didn't mind her being there. If she went down again to Tom now — would he forgive her? — perhaps her father would be there, and he would take her part. But then she wanted Tom to forgive her because he loved her, not because his father told him. No, she would never go down if Tom didn't come to fetch her. This resolution lasted in great intensity for five dark minutes behind the tub; but then the need of being loved, the strongest need in poor Maggie's nature, began to wrestle with her pride, and soon threw it. She crept from behind her tub into the twilight of the long attic, but just then she heard a quick footstep on the stairs.

"Tom had been too much interested in his talk with Luke, in going the round of the premises, walking in and out where he pleased, and whittling sticks without any particular reason, except that he didn't whittle sticks at school, to think of Maggie and the effect his anger had produced on her. He meant to punish her, and that business having been performed, he occupied himself with other matters, like a practical person."—

And so on. It is only after four hundred words more *of this sort* of analysis that the author tells us: — "It

was Tom's step, then, that Maggie heard on the stairs." This is George Eliot's way of portraying the characters of two children who have quarreled.

Much is to be said in favor of this expedient of depicting character by analysis. It is the only means by which the reader may be informed directly of those thoughts and emotions of a character which are the mainsprings of his acts. And since we cannot feel that we know a person intimately unless we understand the workings of his mind at characteristic moments, we derive a great advantage from this immediate presentation of his mental processes. On the other hand, the use of the expedient destroys the very desirable illusion that the reader is an observer actually looking at the action, since the details depicted do not happen to the eye but rather to the analytic understanding. The expedient has the disadvantages of being exceedingly abstract, and of halting happenings while the author tells us why they happened. It is certainly unfortunate, for instance, that it should take Tom a whole long page to get to Maggie after she has heard his "*quick* footstep on the stairs." Furthermore, this expedient tends to destroy the illusion of reality by forcing the reader into a mental attitude which he seldom assumes in looking on at actual life. During actual occurrences people almost never pause to analyze each other and seldom even analyze themselves. They act, and watch other people act, without a microscopic insight into motives. And surely the purpose of narrative should be to represent events as they seem to occur in actuality, rather than to present a dissertation on their causes in the manner of an essay.

An important point, however, remains to be considered. Events are of two kinds, external and internal; things

happen subjectively as well as objectively: and in representing the sort of occurrence which takes place only inside a person's mind, the expedient of analysis is by far the most serviceable means of making clear the elements of character that contribute to it. But if the same expedient be employed habitually in the depiction of external events as well, it is likely to give the impression of unwarrantable vivisection. There is a certain falsity of mood in giving an objective event a subjective rendering.

When, therefore, it is desired to depict a character by direct comment on his actions or his personality, there is a great advantage in allowing the comment to be made by one of the other characters in the story, instead of by the author himself in an attitude of assumed omniscience. Jane Austen deftly exhibits this subtler phase of the expedient in many admirable passages. For instance, in Chapter XXXIII of "Emma," Mrs. Elton thus chatters to Emma Woodhouse: —

"'Jane Fairfax is absolutely charming, Miss Woodhouse. — I quite rave about Jane Fairfax — a sweet, interesting creature. So mild and lady-like — and with such talents! — I assure you I think she has very extraordinary talents. I do not scruple to say that she plays extremely well. I know enough of music to speak decidedly on that point. Oh! she is absolutely charming! You will laugh at my warmth — but upon my word, I talk of nothing but Jane Fairfax.'"

In Chapter XXI the same character has been thus commented on by Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley. Emma speaks first: —

"'Miss Fairfax is reserved.'

"'I always told you she was — a little; but you will soon *overcome* all that part of her reserve which ought to be

overcome, all that has its foundation in diffidence. What arises from discretion must be honoured.'

"'You think her diffident. I do not see it.'"

These passages not only serve to portray, more or less directly, the personality of Jane Fairfax, but serve also at the same time to portray indirectly the personalities of the people who are talking about her. Mrs. Elton, in particular, is very clearly exhibited. And this point leads us to an examination of one of the most effective means of indirect delineation.

If the mere speech of a fictitious figure be reported with sufficient fidelity to truth, it is possible to convey through this expedient alone a very vivid sense of character. Consider the following bits of talk: —

"'You're not a gun-sharp? I am sorry. I could have surprised you. Apart from my gun, my tale don't amount to much of anything. I thank you, but I don't use any tobacco you'd be likely to carry . . . Bull Durham? *Bull Durham!* I take it all back — every last word. Bull Durham — here! If ever you strike Akron, Ohio, when this fool-war's over, remember you've Laughton O. Zigler in your vest pocket. Including the city of Akron. We've a little club there . . . Hell! What's the sense of talking Akron with no pants?'"

"'Did I talk? I despise exaggeration — 'tain't American or scientific — but as true as I'm sitting here like a blue-ended baboon in a kloof, Teddy Roosevelt's Western tour was a maiden's sigh compared to my advertising work.'"

"'But the general was the peach. I presume you're acquainted with the average run of British generals, but this was my first. I sat on his left hand, and he talked like — like the *Ladies' Home Journal*. J'ever read that

paper? It's refined, Sir — and innocuous, and full of nickel-plated sentiments guaranteed to improve the mind. He was it. He began by a Lydia Pinkham heart-to-heart talk about my health, and hoped the boys had done me well, and that I was enjoying my stay in their midst.'"

These passages are taken from Mr. Kipling's story called "The Captive." The action is laid during the South-African war. Is it necessary to add that the speaker is an American gun-inventor who has fought upon the Boer side and has been captured by the British?

One point must be considered carefully. The art of these passages lies mainly in the fact that we learn more about Zigler indirectly, from his manner of talking, than directly, from the things which he tells us of himself. His statement that he comes from Akron, Ohio, is less suggestive than his fondness for Bull Durham. Any direct statement made by a character concerning himself is of no more artistic value than if it were made about him by the author, unless his manner of making it gives at the same time an indirect evidence of his nature.

The subtlest phase of indirect delineation through speech is a conveyance to the reader, through a character's remarks about himself, of a sense of him different from that which his statement literally expresses. Sir Willoughby Patterne, in "The Egoist," talks about himself frequently and in detail; but the reader soon learns from the tone and manner of his utterance to discount the high esteem in which he holds himself. By saying one thing directly, the egoist conveys another and a different thing indirectly to the reader.

But in fiction, as in life, actions speak louder than *words*: and the most convincing way of delineating charac-

ter indirectly is by exhibiting a person in the performance of a characteristic action. If the action be visualized with sufficient clearness and if its dominant details be presented to the reader with adequate emphasis, a more vivid impression of character will be conveyed than through any sort of direct statement by the author. As an instance of characterization through action only, without comment or direct portrayal, let us consider the following passage from the duel scene of "The Master of Ballantræ." Two brothers, Mr. Henry and the Master, hate each other; they fall to altercation over a game of cards; and the scene is narrated by Mackellar, a servant of Mr. Henry's. —

"Mr. Henry laid down his cards. He rose to his feet very softly, and seemed all the while like a person in deep thought. 'You coward!' he said gently, as if to himself. And then, with neither hurry nor any particular violence, he struck the Master in the mouth.

"The Master sprang to his feet like one transfigured; I had never seen the man so beautiful. 'A blow!' he cried. 'I would not take a blow from God Almighty.'

"'Lower your voice,' said Mr. Henry. 'Do you wish my father to interfere for you again?'

"'Gentlemen, gentlemen,' I cried, and sought to come between them.

"The Master caught me by the shoulder, held me at arm's length, and still addressing his brother: 'Do you know what this means?' said he.

"'It was the most deliberate act of my life,' says Mr. Henry.

"'I must have blood, I must have blood for this,' says the Master.

"'Please God it shall be yours,' said Mr. Henry; and he went to the wall and took down a pair of swords that

hung there with others, naked. These he presented to the Master by the points. 'Mackellar shall see us play fair,' said Mr. Henry. 'I think it very needful.'

"'You need insult me no more,' said the Master, taking one of the swords at random. 'I have hated you all my life.'

"'My father is but newly gone to bed,' said Mr. Henry. 'We must go somewhere forth of the house.'

"'There is an excellent place in the long shrubbery,' said the Master.

"'Gentlemen,' said I, 'shame upon you both! Sons of the same mother, would you turn against the life she gave you?'

"'Even so, Mackellar,' said Mr. Henry, with the same perfect quietude of manner he had shown throughout."

It is not necessary for Mackellar to tell us that, whereas Mr. Henry is phlegmatic and deliberate, the Master is impulsive and mercurial. It is not necessary for him to attempt analysis of the emotions and thoughts of the leading characters, since these are sufficiently evident from what they do and say. The action happens to the eye and ear, without the interpretation of an analytic intellect; but the reader is made actually present at the scene, and can see and judge it for himself. The method is absolutely narrative and not at all expository, — entirely objective and concrete. Surely this is the most artistic means of portraying those elements of character which contribute to external, or objective, events: and even what happens inside the mind of a character may often be more poignantly suggested by a concrete account of how he looks and what he does than by an abstract analytic statement of the movements of his mind. When Hepzibah *Pyncheon* opens her shop in the House of the Seven

Gables, her state of feeling is indicated indirectly, by what she does and how she does it.

Perhaps the most delicate means of indirect delineation is to suggest the personality of one character by exhibiting his effect upon certain other people in the story. In the third book of the "Iliad," there is a temporary truce upon the plains of Troy; and certain elders of the city look forth from the tower of the Scæan gates and meditate upon the ten long years of conflict and of carnage during which so many of their sons have died. Toward them walks the white-armed Helen, robed and veiled in white; and when they mark her approach, they say to each other (old and wise and weary with sorrows though they be): —

> "'Small blame is theirs, if both the Trojan knights
> And brazen-mailed Achaians have endured
> So long so many evils for the sake
> Of that one woman.'"
>
> — (Bryant's Version.)

Perhaps the most remarkable instance in modern literature of the use of this expedient is Mr. Kipling's tale of "Mrs. Bathurst." The story is all about the woman from whom it takes its title; but she never for a moment appears upon the scene of action, and is portrayed entirely through her effect upon several different men. Here is a bit of conversation concerning her. Note her effect upon the humorous and not especially sensitive Pyecroft. —

"Said Pyecroft suddenly: —

"'How many women have you been intimate with all over the world, Pritch?'

"Pritchard blushed plum color to the short hairs of his seventeen-inch neck.

"'"'Undreds,' said Pyecroft. 'So've I. How many of 'em can you remember in your own mind, settin' aside the first — an' per'aps the last — *and one more?*'

"'"Few, wonderful few, now I tax myself,' said Sergeant Pritchard, relievedly.

"'"An' how many times might you 'ave been at Aukland?'

"'"One — two,' he began. 'Why, I can't make it more than three times in ten years. But I can remember every time that I ever saw Mrs. B.'

"'"So can I — an' I've only been to Aukland twice — how she stood an' what she was sayin' an' what she looked like. That's the secret. 'Tisn't beauty, so to speak, nor good talk necessarily. It's just It. Some women'll stay in a man's memory if they once walked down a street, but most of 'em you can live with a month on end, an' next commission you'd be put to it to certify whether they talked in their sleep or not, as one might say.'"

Another very delicate expedient is to suggest a character through a careful presentation of his habitual environment. We learn a great deal about Roderick Usher from the melancholy aspect of his House. It is possible to describe a living-room in such a way as to convey a very definite sense of its occupant before he enters it. Notice, for example, how much we learn about Mr. and Mrs. Boffin (especially the latter) from this descriptive passage in Chapter V of "Our Mutual Friend." Silas Wegg has come to fulfil his engagement to read aloud to them the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." —

"It was the queerest of rooms, fitted and furnished more like a luxurious amateur tap-room than anything else *within the* ken of Silas Wegg. There were two wooden

settles by the fire, one on either side of it, with a corresponding table before each. On one of these tables the eight volumes were ranged flat, in a row like a galvanic battery; on the other, certain squat case-bottles of inviting appearance seemed to stand on tiptoe to exchange glances with Mr. Wegg over a front row of tumblers and a basin of white sugar. On the hob, a kettle steamed; on the hearth, a cat reposed. Facing the fire between the settles, a sofa, a footstool, and a little table formed a centerpiece devoted to Mrs. Boffin. They were garish in taste and color, but were expensive articles of drawing-room furniture that had a very odd look beside the settles and the flaring gaslight pendant from the ceiling. There was a flowery carpet on the floor; but, instead of reaching to the fireside, its glowing vegetation stopped short at Mrs. Boffin's footstool, and gave place to a region of sand and sawdust. Mr. Wegg also noticed, with admiring eyes, that, while the flowery land displayed such hollow ornamentation as stuffed birds, and waxen fruits under glass shades, there were, in the territory where vegetation ceased, compensatory shelves on which the best part of a large pie and likewise of a cold joint were plainly discernible among other solids. The room itself was large, though low; and the heavy frames of its old-fashioned windows, and the heavy beams in its crooked ceiling, seemed to indicate that it had once been a house of some mark standing alone in the country."

Neither Boffin nor Mrs. Boffin appears in this descriptive paragraph; yet many of the idiosyncrasies of each are suggested by the conglomeration of queer belongings that they have gathered round them.

The student of the art of fiction may find profitable exercise in practising separately the various means of

portraying character which have been illustrated in this chapter; but, as was stated at the outset, he should always remember that these means are seldom used by the great artists singly, but are generally employed to complement each other in contributing to a central impression. The character of Becky Sharp, for instance, is delineated indirectly through her speech, her actions, her environment, and her effect on other people, and at the same time is delineated directly through comments made upon her by the author and by other figures in the story, through analysis of her thoughts and her emotions, through expository statements of her traits, and through occasional descriptions of her. In all of these ways does Thackeray exert himself to give the world assurance of a woman.

It would, however, be extremely difficult to imagine Becky Sharp divorced from her environment of London high society. She is a part of her setting, and her setting is a part of her. We have just noticed, in the case of that queer room of the Boffins', how the mere representation of setting may contribute to the delineation of character. But setting is important in many other ways; and it is to a special consideration of that element of narrative that we must next turn our attention.

CHAPTER VI

SETTING

In the history of figure painting it is interesting to study the evolution of the element of background. This element is non-existent in the earliest examples of pictorial art. The figures in Pompeiian frescoes are limned upon a blank bright wall, most frequently deep red in color. The father of Italian painting, Cimabue, following the custom of the Byzantine mosaicists, whose work he had doubtless studied at Ravenna, drew his figures against a background devoid of distance and perspective and detail; and even in the work of his greater and more natural pupil, Giotto, the element of background remains comparatively insignificant. What interests us in Giotto's work at Padua and Assisi is first of all the story that he has to tell, and secondly the human quality of the characters that he exhibits. His sense of setting is extremely slight; and the homely details that he presents for the purpose of suggesting the time and place and circumstances of his action are very crudely depicted. His frescoes are all foreground. It is the figures in the forefront of his pictures that arrest our eye. His buildings and his landscapes are conventionalized out of any real reference to his people. These are examples of the first stage of evolution, — the stage in which the element of background bears no significant relation to the main business of the picture.

In the second stage, the background is brought into an

artistic, or decorative, relation with the figures in the foreground. This phase is exhibited by Italian painting at its period of maturity. The great Florentines drew their figures against a background of decorative line, the great Venetians against a background of decorative color. But even in the work of the greatest of them the background exists usually to fulfil a purpose merely decorative, — a purpose with immediate reference to art but without immediate reference to life. There is no real reason, with reference to life itself, why the Mona Lisa of Leonardo should smile inscrutably upon us before a background of jagged rocks and cloudy sky; and the curtains in Raphael's Sistine Madonna are introduced merely as a detail of composition, and are not intended as a literal statement that curtains hung upon a rod exist in heaven.

In the third stage, which is exhibited by later painting, the background is brought into living relation with the figures of the foreground, — a relation suggested not merely by the exigencies of art but rather by the conditions of life itself. Thus the great Dutch *genre* painters, like the younger Teniers, show their characters in immediate human relation to a carefully detailed interior; or if, like Adrian van Ostade, they take them out of doors, it is to show them entirely at home in an accustomed landscape.

This stage, in its most modern development, exhibits an absolutely essential relation between the foreground and the background — the figures and the setting — so that neither could be imagined exactly as it is without the presence of the other. Such an essential harmony is shown in the "Angelus" of Jean-François Millet. The people exist for the sake of giving meaning to the land*scape*; and the landscape exists for the sake of giving

meaning to the people. The "Angelus" is neither figure painting nor landscape painting merely; it is both.

In the history of fiction we may note a similar evolution in the element of setting. The earliest folk-tales of every nation happen "once upon a time," and without any definite localization. In the "Gesta Romanorum," that medieval repository of accumulated narratives, the element of setting is nearly as non-existent as the element of background in the frescoes of Pompeii. Even in the "Decameron" of Boccaccio the stories are seldom localized: they happen almost anywhere at almost any time. The interest in Boccaccio's narrative, like the interest in Giotto's painting, is centered first of all in the element of action, and secondly in the element of character. But his stories are all foreground. When the scene is out of doors, it is set vaguely in a conventional landscape: when it is indoors, it is set vaguely in a conventional palace. Because of this, his narrative is lacking in visual appeal. Most of his *novelle* read like summaries of novels, — setting forth an abstract synopsis of the action rather than a concrete representation of it. He *tells* you what happens, instead of *making* it happen before the eye of your imagination. His characters are drawn in outline merely, instead of being livingly projected in relation to a definite environment. The defect of his narrative, like the defect of Giotto's painting, is mainly lack of background.

Somewhat later in the history of fiction, as in the history of figure painting, we find instances in which the element of setting is used for a decorative purpose, and is brought into an artistic relation with the elements of action and character. Such a use is made of landscape, for example, in the "Orlando Furioso" of Ariosto and

the "Faerie Queene" of Spenser. The settings depicted by these narrative poets are essentially pictorial, and are used as a decorative background to the action rather than as part and parcel of it. If we seek an example in prose rather than in poetry, we need only turn to the "Arcadia" of Sir Philip Sidney. In this again the setting is beautifully fashioned, but is employed merely for a decorative purpose. The background of pastoral landscape bears no necessary relation to the figures in the foreground. It exists for the sake of art rather than for the sake of life. This employment of the element of setting for a purpose essentially pictorial subsists in many later works of fiction, like the "Paul and Virginia" of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. In this the setting is composed and painted for the sake of its own sentimental beauty, and is obtruded even at the expense of the more vital elements of character and action. The story is, as it were, merely a motive for decorative composition.

It is only in fiction of a more modern spirit that the element of setting has been brought into living relation with the action and the characters; and it is only in the last century that the most intimate possibilities of such a relation have been appreciated and applied. Of course the most elementary means of making the setting "part and parcel of the business of the story" is to employ it as a utilitarian adjunct to the action. Granted certain incidents that are to happen, certain scenery and properties are useful, in the novel just as in the theater; and if these are supplied advisedly, the setting will, as it were, become a part of what is happening instead of remaining merely a decorative background to the incidents. The first English author to establish firmly this utilitarian *relation* between the setting and the action was Daniel

Defoe. Defoe was by profession a journalist; and the most characteristic quality of his mind was an habitual matter-of-factness. Plausibility was what he most desired in his fictions; and he discerned instinctively that the readiest means of making a story plausible was by representing with entire concreteness and great wealth of specific detail the physical adjuncts to the action. The multitudinous particulars of Crusoe's island are therefore exhibited concretely to the reader one by one, as Crusoe makes use of them successively in what he does.

But though in Defoe the element of setting is merged with the element of action, it is not brought into intimate relation with the element of character. The island is a part of what Crusoe does, rather than a part of what he is. But the dwelling-room of the Boffins, which was described in the paragraph from "Our Mutual Friend" quoted toward the end of the preceding chapter, is a part of what the Boffins are, rather than of what they do. The setting in the latter case is used as an adjunct to the element of character instead of to the element of action. Fielding and his contemporaries were the first English novelists to make the setting in this way representative of personality as well as useful to the plot; but the finer possibilities of the relation between setting and character were not fully realized until the nineteenth century. The eighteenth-century authors, in so far as they elaborated the element of setting, seem to have done so mainly for the sake of greater vividness. The appeal of setting being visual, the element was employed to illustrate the action and to make the characters clearly evident to the eye. By rendering a story more concrete, a definite setting rendered it more credible. This the eighteenth-century

novelists discerned; but only with the rise of the romantic movement was the element applied to subtler uses.

A new and very interesting attitude toward landscape setting was disclosed by Rousseau in the "Nouvelle Héloise" and developed by his numerous followers in early nineteenth-century romance. The writers who advocated a "return to nature" spelled nature with a capital N and considered it usually as an anthropomorphic presence. As a result of this, when they developed a natural background for their stories, they established a sympathetic interchange of mood between the characters and the landscape, and imagined (to use the famous phrase of Leibnitz) a "pre-established harmony" between the shifting moods of nature and of man. Thus the setting was employed no longer merely to subserve the needs of action or to give a greater vividness of visual appeal, but was used rather to symbolize and represent the human emotions evoked in the characters at significant moments of the plot. When the hero was suffering with sadness, the sky was hung with heavy clouds; and when his mind grew illumined with a glimmering of hope, the sun broke through a cloud-rift, casting light over the land.

Dickens is especially fond of imagining an emotional harmony between his settings and his incidents. Consider for a moment the following well-known passage from the funeral of Little Nell ("The Old Curiosity Shop," Chapter LXXII): —

"Along the crowded path they bore her now; pure as the newly-fallen snow that covered it; whose day on earth had been as fleeting. Under the porch, where she had sat when Heaven in its mercy brought her to that peaceful spot, she passed again; and the old church received her *in its quiet* shade.

"They carried her to one old nook, where she had many and many a time sat musing, and laid their burden softly on the pavement. The light streamed on it through the colored window — a window where the boughs of trees were ever rustling in the summer, and where the birds sang sweetly all day long. With every breath of air that stirred among those branches in the sunshine, some trembling, changing light would fall upon her grave. . . .

"They saw the vault covered, and the stone fixed down. Then, when the dusk of evening had come on, and not a sound disturbed the sacred stillness of the place — when the bright moon poured in her light on tomb and monument, on pillar, wall, and arch, and most of all (it seemed to them) upon her quiet grave — in that calm time, when outward things and inward thoughts teem with assurances of immortality, and worldly hopes and fears are humbled in the dust before them — then, with tranquil and submissive hearts, they turned away, and left the child to God."

Here the mood of the scene is expressed almost entirely through the element of setting; and the human emotion of the mourners is realized and represented by the aspect of the churchyard.

The excessive use of this expedient is deplored by John Ruskin in a chapter of "Modern Painters" entitled "The Pathetic Fallacy." His point is that, since concrete objects do not actually experience human emotions, it is a violation of artistic truth to ascribe such emotions to them. But, on the other hand, it is indubitably true that human beings habitually translate their own abstract feelings into the concrete terms of their surroundings; and therefore, in a subjective sense at least, an emotional harmony frequently does exist between the mood of a man and the

aspect of his environment. The same place may at the same time look gloomy to a melancholy man and cheerful to a merry one; and there is therefore a certain human fitness in describing it as gloomy or as cheerful, according to the feeling of the character observing it. Doubtless to a man tremendously bereaved the very rain may seem a weeping of high heaven; and surely there are times when it is deeply true, subjectively, to say that the morning stars all sing together. What we may call emotional similarity of setting is therefore not necessarily a fallacy. Even when it subverts the actual, as in the fable of the morning stars, it may yet be representative of reality. In its commoner and less exaggerative phases it is very useful for purposes of suggestion; and only when it becomes blatant through abuse may it be said to belie the laws of life.

Frequently, however, emotional similarity between the setting and the characters is less serviceable, for the sake of emphasis, than emotional contrast. In the following passage from Mr. Kipling's "Without Benefit of Clergy," the serene and perfect happiness of Holden and Ameera is emphasized by contrast with the night-aspect of the plague-infested city: —

"'My lord and my love, let there be no more foolish talk of going away. Where thou art, I am. It is enough.' She put an arm round his neck and a hand on his mouth.

"There are not many happinesses so complete as those that are snatched under the shadow of the sword. They sat together and laughed, calling each other openly by every pet name that could move the wrath of the gods. The city below them was locked up in its own torments. Sulphur fires blazed in the streets; the conches in the Hindu temples screamed and bellowed, for the gods were

inattentive in those days. There was a service in the great Mahomedan shrine, and the call to prayer from the minarets was almost unceasing. They heard the wailing in the houses of the dead, and once the shriek of a mother who had lost a child and was calling for its return. In the gray dawn they saw the dead borne out through the city gates, each litter with its own little knot of mourners. Wherefore they kissed each other and shivered."

An emotional contrast of this nature between the mood of the characters and the mood of the setting may be pushed to the point of irony. In a story by Alphonse Daudet, entitled "The Elixir of the Reverend Father Gaucher," a certain monastery is saved from financial ruin by the sale of a cordial which Father Gaucher has invented and distilled. But the necessity of sampling the cordial frequently during the process of manufacturing it leads the reverend father eventually to become an habitual drunkard. And toward the end of the story an ironic contrast is drawn between the solemn monastery, murmurous with chants and prayers, and Father Gaucher in his distillery hilariously singing a ribald drinking-song.

The uses of setting that have been thus far considered have been artistic rather than philosophical in nature; but very recent writers have grown to use the element not only for the sake of illustrating character and action but also for the sake of determining them. The sociologists of the nineteenth century have come to regard circumstance as a prime motive for action, and environment as a prime influence on character; and recent writers have applied this philosophic thesis in their employment of the element of setting.

The way in which the setting may suggest the action is

thus discoursed upon by Stevenson in his "Gossip on Romance": —

"Drama is the poetry of conduct, romance the poetry of circumstance. The pleasure that we take in life is of two sorts — the active and the passive. Now we are conscious of a great command over our destiny; anon we are lifted up by circumstance, as by a breaking wave, and dashed we know not how into the future. Now we are pleased by our conduct, anon merely pleased by our surroundings. It would be hard to say which of these modes of satisfaction is the more effective, but the latter is surely the more constant. . . .

"One thing in life calls for another; there is a fitness in events and places. The sight of a pleasant arbour puts it in our mind to sit there. One place suggests work, another idleness, a third early rising and long rambles in the dew. The effect of night, of any flowing water, of lighted cities, of the peep of day, of ships, of the open ocean, calls up in the mind an army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something, we feel, should happen; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it. And many of the happiest hours of life fleet by us in this vain attendance on the genius of the place and moment. It is thus that tracts of young fir, and low rocks that reach into deep soundings, particularly torture and delight me. Something must have happened in such places, and perhaps ages back, to members of my race; and when I was a child I tried in vain to invent appropriate games for them, as I still try, just as vainly, to fit them with the proper story. Some places speak distinctly. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for *ship*wreck. Other spots again seem to abide their destiny,

suggestive and impenetrable, 'miching mallecho.' The inn at Burford Bridge, with its arbours and green garden and silent, eddying river — though it is known already as the place where Keats wrote some of his *Endymion* and Nelson parted from his Emma — still seems to wait the coming of the appropriate legend. Within these ivied walls, behind these old green shutters, some further business smoulders, waiting for its hour. The old Hawes Inn at the Queen's Ferry makes a similar call upon my fancy. There it stands, apart from the town, beside the pier, in a climate of its own, half inland, half marine — in front, the ferry bubbling with the tide and the guardship swinging to her anchor; behind, the old garden with the trees. Americans seek it already for the sake of Lovel and Oldbuck, who dined there at the beginning of the *Antiquary*. But you need not tell me — that is not all; there is some story, unrecorded or not yet complete, which must express the meaning of that inn more fully. . . . I have lived both at the Hawes and Burford in a perpetual flutter, on the heels, as it seemed, of some adventure that should justify the place; but though the feeling had me to bed at night and called me again at morning in one unbroken round of pleasure and suspense, nothing befell me in either worth remark. The man or the hour had not yet come; but some day, I think, a boat shall put off from the Queen's Ferry, fraught with a dear cargo, and some frosty night a horseman, on a tragic errand, rattle with his whip upon the green shutters of the inn at Burford."

In this way, the setting may, in many cases, exist as the initial element of the narrative, and suggest an action appropriate to itself. But it may do more than that. In certain special instances the setting may not only suggest, but may even cause, the action, and remain the deciding

factor in determining its course. This is the case, for example, in Mr. Kipling's story, "At the End of the Passage," which opens thus: —

"Four men, each entitled to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,' sat at a table playing whist. The thermometer marked — for them — one hundred and one degrees of heat. The room was darkened till it was only just possible to distinguish the pips of the cards and the very white faces of the players. A tattered, rotten punkah of whitewashed calico was puddling the hot air and whining dolefully at each stroke. Outside lay gloom of a November day in London. There was neither sky, sun, nor horizon, — nothing but a brown purple haze of heat. It was as though the earth were dying of apoplexy.

"From time to time clouds of tawny dust rose from the ground without wind or warning, flung themselves table-cloth-wise among the tops of the parched trees, and came down again. Then a whirling dust-devil would scutter across the plain for a couple of miles, break, and fall outward, though there was nothing to check its flight save a long low line of piled railway-sleepers white with the dust, a cluster of huts made of mud, condemned rails, and canvas, and the one squat four-roomed bungalow that belonged to the assistant engineer in charge of a section of the Gaudhari State Line then under construction."

The terrible tale that follows could happen only as a result of the fearful loneliness and, more especially, the maddening heat of such a place as is described in these opening paragraphs. The setting in this story causes and determines the action.

But in many other tales by recent writers the setting *is used not* so much to determine the action as to influence

and mold the characters; and when employed for this purpose, it becomes expressive of one of the most momentous truths of human life. For what a man *is* at any period of his existence is largely the result of the interaction of two forces, — namely, the innate tendencies of his nature and the shaping power of his environment. Mr. Meredith, and more especially Mr. Thomas Hardy, therefore devote a great deal of attention to setting as an influence on character. Consider, for example, the following brief passage from Mr. Hardy's "Tess of the D'Ubervilles":—

"Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of Froom Vale, at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization, it was impossible that the most fanciful love should not grow passionate. The ready hearts existing there were impregnated by their surroundings."

Zola, in his essay on "The Experimental Novel," states that the proper function of setting is to exhibit "the environment which determines and completes the man"; and the philosophic study of environment reacting upon character is one of the main features of his own monumental series of novels devoted to the Rougon-Macquart family. His example has been followed by a host of recent writers; and a new school of fiction has grown up, the main purpose of which is to exhibit the influence of certain carefully studied social, natural, business, or professional conditions on the sort of people who live and work among them.

If the setting be used both to determine the action and to mold the characters, it may stand forth as the most important of the three elements of narrative. In Victor Hugo's "Notre Dame de Paris," the cathedral is the leading factor of the story. Claude Frollo would be a

very different person if it were not for the church; and many of the main events, such as the ultimate tragic scene when Quasimodo hurls Frollo from the tower-top, could not happen in any other place. In Mr. Kipling's very subtle story entitled "An Habitation Enforced," which appeared in the *Century Magazine* for August, 1905, the setting is really the hero of the narrative. An American millionaire and his wife, whose ancestors were English, settle for a brief vacation in the county of England from which the wife's family originally came. Gradually the old house and the English landscape take hold of them; ancestral feelings rise to dominate them; and they remain forever after in enforced habitation on the ancient soil.

All that has been said thus far of setting in general applies of course to one of the most interesting of its elements, — the weather. In simple stories like the usual nursery tale, the weather may be non-existent. Or it may exist mainly for a decorative purpose, like the frequent golden oriental dawns of Spenser's poem or the superb and colorful symphonies of sky and sea in Pierre Loti's "Iceland Fisherman." It may be used as a utilitarian adjunct to the action: at the end of "The Mill on the Floss," as we have already noted, the rains descend and the flood comes merely for the purpose of drowning Tom and Maggie. Or it may be employed to illustrate a character: we are told of Clara Middleton, in "The Egoist," that she possesses the "art of dressing to suit the season and the sky"; and therefore the look of the atmosphere at any hour helps to convey to us a sense of her appearance. Somewhat more artistically, the weather may be planned in pre-established harmony with the mood of the characters: this expedient is wonderfully used in the wild and wind-swept tales of Fiona MacLeod.

On the other hand, the weather may stand in emotional contrast with the characters: the Master of Ballantrae and Mr. Henry fight their duel on a night of absolute stillness and stifling cold. Again, the weather may be used to determine the action: in Mr. Kipling's early story called "False Dawn," the blinding sandstorm causes Saumarez to propose to the wrong girl. Or it may be employed as a controlling influence over character: the tremendous storm toward the end of "Richard Feverel," in the chapter entitled "Nature Speaks," determines the return of the hero to his wife. In some cases, even, the weather itself may be the real hero of the narrative: the great eruption of Vesuvius in "The Last Days of Pompeii" dominates the termination of the story.

Although the weather is a subject upon everybody's tongue, there are very few people who are capable of talking about it with intelligence and art. Very few writers of fiction — and nearly all of them are recent — have exhibited a mastery of the weather, — a mastery based at once upon a detailed and accurate observation of natural phenomena and a philosophic sense of the relation between these phenomena and the concerns of human beings. Perhaps in no other detail of craftsmanship does Robert Louis Stevenson so clearly prove his mastery as in his marshaling of the weather, always vividly and truthfully described, to serve a purpose always fitting to his fictions.

Let us next consider the main difference between the merits of a good romantic and a good realistic setting. Since the realist leads us to a comprehension of his truth through a careful imitation of the actual, the thing most to be desired in a realistic setting is fidelity to fact; and this can be attained only by accurate observation. But

since the romantic is not bound to imitate the actual, and fabricates his investiture merely for the sake of embodying his truth clearly and consistently, the thing most to be desired in a romantic setting is imaginative fitness to the action and the characters; and this can sometimes be attained by artistic inventiveness alone, without display of observation of the actual. Verisimilitude is of course the highest merit of either sort of setting; but whereas verisimilitude with the realist lies in resemblance to actuality, verisimilitude with the romantic lies rather in artistic fitness. The distinction may perhaps be best observed in the historical novels produced by the one and by the other school. In the setting of realistic historical novels, like George Eliot's "Romola" and Flaubert's "Salammbô," what the authors have mainly striven for has been accuracy of detail; but in romantic historical novels, like those of Scott and Dumas père, the authors have sought rather for imaginative fitness of setting. The realists have followed the letter, and the romantics the spirit, of other times and lands.

As an example of a pure romantic setting, far removed from actuality and yet thoroughly truthful in artistic fitness to the action and the characters, we can do no better than examine the often-quoted opening of Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher:" —

"During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was — but, with the first glimpse of *the building*, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my

spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. I looked upon the scene before me — upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain, upon the bleak walls, upon the vacant eye-like windows, upon a few rank sedges, and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees — with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveler upon opium: the bitter lapse into every-day life, the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart, an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. . . . It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate, its capacity for sorrowful impression; and acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down — but with a shudder even more thrilling than before — upon the remodelled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows."

Certainly this setting bears very little resemblance to the actual; but just as certainly its artistic fitness to the tale of terror which it preludes gives it an imaginative verisimilitude.

As an example of a realistic setting, closely copying the actual, let us examine the following passage from "Adam Bede" (Chapter XVIII): —

"You might have known it was Sunday if you had only

waked up in the farmyard. The cocks and hens seemed to know it, and made only crooning subdued noises; the very bull-dog looked less savage, as if he would have been satisfied with a smaller bite than usual. The sunshine seemed to call all things to rest and not to labor; it was asleep itself on the moss-grown cow-shed; on the group of white ducks nestling together with their bills tucked under their wings; on the old black sow stretched languidly on the straw, while her largest young one found an excellent spring-bed on his mother's fat ribs; on Alick, the shepherd, in his new smock-frock, taking an uneasy siesta, half-sitting, half-standing on the granary steps."

There is no obvious imaginative fitness in this passage, since in the chapter where it occurs the chief characters are going to a funeral; but it has an extraordinary verisimilitude, owing to the author's accurate observation of the details of life in rural England.

These two passages differ very widely from each other. In one thing, and one only, are they alike. Each of them exhibits the subtle quality called "atmosphere." This quality is very difficult to define, though its presence may be recognized instinctively in any work of graphic art, like a painting or a description. Without attempting to define it, we may discover the technical basis for its presence if we seek out the sole deliberate device in which these two passages, different as they are in every other feature, are at one. It will be noticed that in each of them the details selected for presentation have been chosen solely for the sake of a common quality inherent in them — the quality of somberness and gloom in the one case, and the quality of Sabbath quietude in the other — and that they have been marshaled to convey *a complete* sense of this central and pervading quality.

It is commonly supposed that what is called "atmosphere" in a description is dependent upon the setting forth of a multiplicity of details; but this popular conception is a fallacy. "Atmosphere" is dependent rather upon a strict selection of details pervaded by a common quality, a rigorous rejection of all others that are dissonant in mood, and an arrangement of those selected with a view to exhibiting their common quality as the pervading spirit of the scene.

This is obviously the technical basis for the "atmosphere" of a purely imaginary setting like that of the melancholy House of Usher. The effect is undeniably produced by the suppression of all details that do not contribute to the central sense of gloom. But the same device underlies (less obviously, to be sure) all such descriptions of actual places as are rich in "atmosphere." What is called "local color" — the very look and tone of a definite locality — is produced not by photographic multiplicity of details, but by a marshaling of materials carefully selected to suggest the central spirit of the place to be depicted. The camera frequently defeats itself by flinging into emphasis details that are dissonant with the informing spirit of the scene it seeks to reproduce: so also does the author who overcrowds his picture with multifarious details, however faithful they may be to fact. The true triumphs of "local coloring" have been made by men who have struck at the heart and spirit of a place — have caught its tone and timber as George Du Maurier did with the *Quartier Latin* — and have set forth only such details as tingled with this spiritual tone.

We have studied the many uses of the element of setting, and have seen that in the best-developed fiction it has grown to be entirely co-ordinate with the elements of

character and action. Novelists have come to consider that any given story can happen only in a given set of circumstances, and that if the setting be changed the action must be altered and the characters be differently drawn. It is therefore impossible, in the best fiction of the present day, to consider the setting as divorced from the other elements of the narrative. There was a time, to be sure, when description for its own sake existed in the novel, and the action was halted to permit the introduction of pictorial passages bearing no necessary relation to the business of the story, — "blocks" of setting, as it were, which might be removed without detriment to the progression of the narrative. But the practice of the best contemporary novelists is summed up and expressed by Mr. Henry James in this emphatic sentence from his essay on "The Art of Fiction":—"I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks, nor conceive, in any novel worth discussing at all, of a passage of description that is not in its intention narrative."

CHAPTER VII

THE POINT OF VIEW IN NARRATIVE

We have now examined in detail the elements of narrative, and must next consider the various points of view from which they may be seen and, in consequence, be represented. Granted a given series of events to be set forth, the structure of the plot, the means of character delineation, the use of setting, the entire tone and tenor of the narrative, are all dependent directly on the answer to the question, Who shall tell the story?

For a given train of incidents is differently seen and judged, according to the standpoint from which it is observed. The evidence in most important murder trials consists mainly of successive narratives told by different witnesses; and it is very interesting to notice, in comparing them, how very different a tone and tenor is given to the same event by each of the observers who recounts it. It remains for the jury to determine, if possible, from a comparison of the various views of the various witnesses, what it was that actually happened. But this, in many cases, is extremely difficult. One witness saw the action in one way, another in another; one formed a certain judgment of the character of the accused, another formed a judgment diametrically different; each has his separate sense of the train of causation that culminated in the act; the accused himself would disagree with all the witnesses, if indeed he were capable of looking on the facts without conscious or unconscious self-deception; and we may be

certain that an infallible omniscient mind, cognizant of all the hidden motives, would see the matter differently still. The task of the jury is, in the main, to induce from all these tragic inconsistencies an absolute outlook upon the real truth that underlies the facts so differently seen and so variously judged.

Such an absolute outlook is hardly possible to the finite mind of man; and though it is often assumed by the writer of fiction in the telling of his tale, it can seldom be consistently maintained. It is therefore safer to acknowledge that the absolute truth of a story, whether actual or fictitious, can never be entirely told; that the same train of incidents looks different from different points of view; and that therefore the various points of view from which any story may be looked upon should be studied carefully for the purpose of determining from which of them it is possible, in a given case, to approach most nearly a clear vision of the truth.

The points of view from which a story may be seen and told are many and various; but they may all be grouped into two classes, the internal and the external. A story seen internally is narrated in the first person by one of its participants; a story seen externally is narrated in the third person by a mind aloof from the events depicted. There are, of course, many variations, both of the internal and of the external point of view. These in turn must be examined, for the purpose of determining the special advantages and disadvantages of each.

First of all, a story may be told by the leading actor in its series of events, — the hero, as in "Henry Esmond," or the heroine, as in "Jane Eyre." This point of view is of especial value in narratives in which the element of *action* is predominant. The multifarious adventures of

Gil Blas sound at once more vivid and more plausible narrated in the first person than they would sound narrated in the third. When what is done is either strange or striking, we prefer to be told about it by the very man who did it. "Treasure Island" is narrated by Jim Hawkins, "Kidnapped" by David Balfour; and much of the vividness of these exciting tales depends upon the fact that they are told in each case by a boy who stood ever in the forefront of the action. The plausibility of "Robinson Crusoe" is increased by the convention that the hero is narrating his own personal experience: in fact Defoe, in all his fictions, preferred to write in the first person, because what he sought primarily was plausibility of tone.

This point of view is also of supreme advantage in recounting personal emotion. Consider for a moment the following paragraph from "Kidnapped" (Chapter X):—

"I do not know if I was what you call afraid; but my heart beat like a bird's, both quick and little; and there was a dimness came before my eyes which I continually rubbed away, and which continually returned. As for hope, I had none; but only a darkness of despair and a sort of anger against all the world that made me long to sell my life as dear as I was able. I tried to pray, I remember, but that same hurry of my mind, like a man running, would not suffer me to think upon the words; and my chief wish was to have the thing begin and be done with it."

Now, for the sake of experiment, let us go through the passage, substituting the pronoun "he" for the pronoun "I." Thus:—

"He was hardly what is called afraid; but his heart beat like a bird's, both quick and little; and there was a dimness came before his eyes which he continually

rubbed away, and which continually returned. As for hope, he had none . . ." and so forth. Notice how much vividness is lost, — how much immediacy of emotion. The zest and tang of the experience is sacrificed, because the reader is forced to stand aloof and observe it from afar.

The point of view of the leading actor makes for vividness in still another way. It necessitates an absolute concreteness and objectivity in the delineation of the subsidiary characters. On the other hand, it precludes analysis of their emotions and their thoughts. The hero can tell us only what they said and did, how they looked in action and in speech, and what they seemed to him to think and feel. But he cannot enter their minds and delve among their motives. Furthermore he cannot, without sacrificing naturalness of mood, analyze to any great extent his own mental processes. Consequently it is almost impossible to tell from the hero's point of view a story in which the main events are mental or subjective. We can hardly imagine George Eliot writing in the first person: the "psychological novel" demands the third.

But the chief difficulty in telling a story from the leading actor's point of view is the difficulty of characterizing the narrator. All means of direct delineation are taken from him. He cannot write essays on his merits or his faults; he can neither describe nor analyze himself; he cannot see himself as others see him. We must derive our sense of who and what he is, solely from the things he does and says, and from his manner of telling us about them. And although it is not especially difficult, within a brief compass, to delineate a character through his way of telling things [Notice Laughton O. Zigler, in Mr. Kip*ling's* "The Captive," whose speech has been examined

in a former chapter], it is extremely difficult to maintain this expedient consistently throughout a lengthy novel.

Furthermore, an extended story can be told only by a person with a well-trained sense of narrative; and it is often hard to concede to the hero the narrative ability that he displays. How is it, we may ask, that Jim Hawkins is capable of such masterly description as that of "the brown old seaman, with the sabre cut," in the second paragraph of "Treasure Island"? How is it that David Balfour, an untutored boy, is capable of writing the rhythmic prose of Robert Louis Stevenson, master of style? And in many cases it is also difficult to concede to the hero an adequate motive for telling his own story. Why is it that, in the sequel to "Kidnapped," David Balfour should write out all the intimate details of his love for Catriona? And how is it conceivable that Jane Eyre should tell to any one, and least of all to the general public, the profound privacies of emotion evoked by her relation with Mr. Rochester?

The answer is, of course, that such violations of the hard terms of actuality are justified by literary convention; and that if the gain in vividness be great enough, the reader will be willing to concede, first, that the story shall be told by the leading actor, regardless of motive, and second, that he shall be granted the requisite mastery of narrative. But the fact remains that it is very hard for the hero to draw his own character except in outline; and therefore if the emphasis is to lie less on what he does than on the sort of person that he is, the expedient will be ineffectual.

The main structural advantage of telling the story through the person of the hero is that his presence as the central figure in every event narrated makes for coherence

and gives the story unity. But attendant disadvantages are that it is often difficult to account for the hero's presence in every scene, that he cannot be an eye-witness to events happening at the same time in different places, and that it is hard to account for his possession of knowledge regarding those details of the plot which have no immediate bearing on himself. It seems always somewhat lame to state, as heroes telling their own stories are frequently obliged to do, "These things I did not know at the time, and found out only afterwards; but I insert them here, because it is at this point in the plot that they belong."

Many of these disadvantages may be overcome by telling the tale from the point of view, not of the leading actor, but of some minor personage in the story. In this case again, analysis of character is precluded; but the narrator may delineate the leading actor directly, through descriptive and expository comment. In stories where the hero is an extraordinary person, and could not without immodesty descant upon his own unusual capabilities, it is of obvious advantage to represent him from the point of view of an admiring friend. Thus when Poe invented the detective story, he wisely decided to exhibit the extraordinary analytic power of Dupin through a narrative told not by the detective himself but by a man who knew him well; and Dr. A. Conan Doyle, following in his footsteps, has invented Dr. Watson to tell the tales of Sherlock Holmes.

The actual instance of Boswell and Johnson substantiates the possibility of a minor actor's knowing intimately all phases of a hero's life and character. And since the point of view of the secondary personage is just as internal *to the* events themselves as that of the leading actor, the

story may be told with an immediacy, a vividness, and a plausibility approximating closely the effect derived from a narrative told by the hero. And there is now less difficulty in accounting for the narrator's knowledge of all the details of the plot. He can witness minor necessary scenes at which the hero is not present; he can know things (and tell them to the reader) which at the time the hero did not know; and if his presence be withheld from an important incident, the hero can narrate it to him afterward.

Nevertheless, it is often very difficult to maintain throughout a long story the point of view of a minor actor in the plot. Thackeray breaks down completely in his attempt to tell "The Newcomes" from the point of view of Arthur Pendennis, the hero of a former novel. Stevenson assigns to Mackellar the task of narrating "The Master of Ballantrae": but when the Master disappears and Mackellar remains at home with Mr. Henry, it is necessary for the author to invent a second personage, the Chevalier de Burke, to tell the story of the Master's wanderings.

This last instance leads us to consider the possibility of telling different sections of the story from the points of view of different characters, assigning to each the particular phase of the narrative that he is especially fitted to recount. Three quarters of the "Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" is narrated in the third person, externally; but the final intimate vividness of horror is gained by shifting to an internal point of view for the two concluding chapters, — the first written by Dr. Lanyon, and the last by Jekyll himself. Mr. Kipling has developed to very subtle uses the expedient of opening a story from the point of view of a narrator who is named simply "I"

and who is not characterized in any way at all, and then letting the story proper be told to this impersonal narrator by several characters who are clearly delineated through their speech and through the parts that they have played in the tale that they are telling. This device is used in nearly all the stories of the "Soldiers Three." The narrator meets Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Learoyd under certain circumstances, and gathers from them bit by bit the various features of the story, — one detail being contributed by one of the actors, another by another, until out of the successive fragments the story is built up. It is in this way also, as we have already noted, that the tale of Mrs. Bathurst is set before the reader.

A convenient means of shifting the burden of the narrative at any point to a certain special character is to introduce a letter written by that character to one of the other people in the plot. This expedient is employed with extraordinary cleverness by Mr. Meredith in "Evan Harrington." Most of the tale is told externally; but every now and then the clever and witty Countess de Saldar writes a letter in which a leading incident is illuminated from her personal point of view.

Ever since the days of Richardson the device has frequently been used of telling an entire story through a series of letters exchanged among the characters. The main advantage of this method is the constant shifting of the point of view, which makes it possible for the reader to see every important incident through the eyes of each of the characters in turn. Furthermore, it is comparatively easy to characterize in the first person when the thing that is written is so intimate and personal as a letter. But the disadvantage of the device lies in the fact *that it* tends toward incoherence in the structure of the

narrative. It is hard for the author to stick to the point at every moment without violating the casual and discursive tone that the epistolary style demands.

Of course a certain unity may be gained if the letters used are all written by a single character. The chief advantage of this method over a direct narrative written by one of the actors is the added motive for the revelation of intimate matters which is furnished by the fact that the narrator is writing, not for the public at large, but only for the friend, or friends, to whom the letters are addressed. But a series of letters written by one person only is very likely to become monotonous; and more is usually gained than lost by assigning the epistolary role successively to different characters.

We have seen that, although the employment of an internal point of view gives a narrative vividness of action, objectivity of observation, immediacy of emotion, and plausibility of tone, it is attended by several difficulties in the delineation of the characters and the construction of the plot. It is therefore in many cases more advisable for the author to look upon the narrative externally and to write it in the third person. But there are several different ways of doing this; for though a story viewed externally is told in every case by a mind distinct from that of any of the characters, there are many different stations in which that mind may set itself, and many different moods in which it may recount the story.

First of all (to start with a phase that contrasts most widely with the internal point of view) the external mind may set itself equidistant from all the characters and may assume toward them an attitude of absolute omniscience. The story, in such a case, is told by a sort of god, who is cognizant of the past and future of the action while he is

looking at the present, and who sees into the minds and hearts of all the characters at once and understands them better than they do themselves.

The main practical advantage in assuming the god-like point of view is that the narrator is never obliged to account for his possession of intimate information. He can observe events which happen at the same time in places widely separated. Darkness cannot dim his eyes; locked doors cannot shut him out. He can be with a character when that character is most alone. He can make clear to us the thoughts that do not tremble into speech, the emotions that falter and subside into inaction. He can know, and can convey to us, how much of a person's real thought is expressed, and how much is concealed, by the language that he uses. And the reader seeks no motive to account for the narrator's revelation of the personal secrets of the characters.

The omniscient point of view is the only one that permits upon a large scale the depiction of character through mental analysis. It is therefore usually used in the "psychological novel." It was employed always by George Eliot, and has been selected almost always by Mr. Meredith. It is, of course, invaluable for telling the sort of story whose main events are mental, or subjective. A spiritual experience which does not translate itself into concrete action can be viewed adequately only from the god-like point of view. But when it is employed in the narration of objective events, the writer runs the danger of undue abstractness. A certain vividness — a certain immediacy of observation — are likely to be lost, because of the aloofness from the characters of the mind that sees them.

This point of view is at once the most easy and the

most difficult that the author may assume. Technically it is the easiest, because the writer is absolutely free in the selection and the patterning of his narrative materials: but humanly it is the most difficult, because it is hard for any man consistently to play the god, even toward his own fictitious creatures. Although George Eliot assumes omniscience of Daniel Deronda, the consensus of opinion among men of sound judgment is that she does not really know her hero. Deronda is in truth a lesser person than she thinks him; and her assumption of omniscience breaks down. In fact, unless an author is gifted with the god-like wisdom of Mr. Meredith, he is almost sure to break down in the effort to sustain the omniscient attitude consistently throughout a complicated novel.

Therefore, in assuming a point of view external to the characters, it is usually wiser for the author to accept a compromise and to impose certain definite limits upon his own omniscience. Thus, while maintaining the prerogative to enter at any moment the minds of one or more of his characters, he may limit his observation of the others to what was actually seen and heard of them by those of whose minds he is omniscient. In such a case, although the author tells the story in the third person, he virtually sees the story from the point of view of a certain actor, or of certain actors, in it. The only phase of this device which we need to examine is that wherein the novelist's omniscience is limited to a single character.

This special point of view is employed with consummate art by Jane Austen. In "Emma," for example, she portrays every intimate detail of the heroine's thoughts and feelings, entering Emma's mind at will, or looking at her from the outside with omniscient eyes. But in dealing with the other characters, the author limits her own

knowledge to what Emma knew about them, and sees them consistently through the eyes of the heroine. Hence the story, although written by Jane Austen in the third person, is really seen by Emma Woodhouse and thought of in the first. Similarly, in "Pride and Prejudice," Elizabeth Bennet is the only character that the author permits herself to analyze at any length: the others are seen objectively, merely as Elizabeth saw them. The reader is made acquainted with every step in the heroine's gradual change of feeling toward Mr. Darcy; but of the change in Darcy's thoughts and feelings toward Elizabeth the reader is told nothing until she herself discovers it.

Of course, in applying this device, it is possible for the author, at certain points in the narrative, to shift his limited omniscience from one of the characters to another. In such a case, although the story is told throughout consistently in the third person, one scene may be viewed from the standpoint of one of the characters, another from that of another character, and so on.

Imagine for a moment two adjacent rooms with a single door between them which is locked; and suppose a character alone in each of the rooms, — each person thinking of the other. Now an author assuming absolute omniscience could tell us what each of them was thinking at the self-same moment: the locked door would not be a bar to him. But an author telling the story from the attitude of limited omniscience could tell us only what one of them was thinking, and would not be able to see beyond the door. Whether or not he would find himself at liberty to choose which room he should be cognizant of, would depend of course on whether he was maintaining the same point of view throughout his story or was selecting it anew for *every* scene. In the first case, the one character whom

he could see would be determined in advance: in the other, he should have to decide from the point of view of which of them that special scene could be the more effectively set forth.

The attitude of limited omniscience is more easy to maintain than that of a god-like mind intimately cognizant of all the characters at once; and furthermore, the employment of the more restricted point of view is more likely to produce the illusion of life. In actual experience, we see only one mind internally, — our own; all other people we look upon externally: and a story, therefore, which lays bare to us one mind and only one is more in tune with life itself than a story in which many minds are searched by an all-seeing eye. Also, a story told in the third person from the point of view which has been illustrated from Jane Austen's novels enjoys nearly every advantage of a narrative told in the first person by the leading actor, without being encumbered by certain of the most noticeable disadvantages.

For the sake of concreteness, however, it is often advisable for the author writing in the third person to restrict his point of view still further, and, foregoing absolutely the prerogative of omniscience, to limit himself to an attitude merely observant and entirely external to all the characters. In such a case the author wears, as it were, an invisible cap like that of Fortunatus, which permits him to move unnoticed among his characters; and he reports to us externally their looks, their actions, and their speech, without ever assuming an ability to delve into their minds. This rigidly external point of view is employed frequently by Guy de Maupassant in his briefer fictions; but although it is especially valuable in the short story, it is extremely difficult to maintain through

the extensive compass of a novel. The main advantage of this point of view is that it necessitates upon the part of the author an attitude toward his story which is at all moments visual rather than intellectual. He does not give a ready-made interpretation of his incidents, but merely projects them before the eyes of his readers and allows to each the privilege of interpreting them for himself. But, on the other hand, the reader loses the advantage of the novelist's superior knowledge of his creatures: and, excepting in dramatic moments when the motives are self-evident from the action, may miss the human purport of the scene.

In employing every phase of the external point of view except the one which has been last discussed, the author is free to choose between two very different tones of narrative, — the impersonal and the personal. He may either obliterate or emphasize his own personality as a factor in the story. The great epics and folk-tales have all been told impersonally. Whatever sort of person Homer may have been, he never obtrudes himself into his narrative; and we may read both the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" without deriving any more definite sense of his personality than may be drawn from the hints which are given us by the things he knows about. No one knows the author of "Beowulf" or of the "Nibelungen Lied." These stories seem to tell themselves. They are seen from nobody's point of view, or from anybody's — whichever way we choose to say it. Many modern authors, like Sir Walter Scott, instinctively assume the epic attitude toward their characters and incidents: they look upon them with a large unconsciousness of self and depict them just as any one would see them. Other authors, like Mr. William *Dean* Howells, strive deliberately to keep the personal

note out of their stories: self-consciously they triumph over self in the endeavor to leave their characters alone.

But novelists of another class prefer to admit frankly to the reader that the narrator who stands apart from all the characters and writes about them in the third person is the author himself. They give a personal tone to the narrative; they assert their own peculiarities of taste and judgment, and never let you forget that they, and they alone, are telling the story. The reader has to see it through their eyes. It is in this way, for example, that Thackeray displays his stories, — pitying his characters, admiring them, making fun of them, or loving them, and never letting slip an opportunity to chat about the matter with his readers.

Mr. Howells, in Section XV of his "Criticism and Fiction," comments adversely on Thackeray's tendency "to stand about in his scene, talking it over with his hands in his pockets, interrupting the action, and spoiling the illusion in which alone the truth of art resides"; and in a further sentence he condemns him as "a writer who had so little artistic sensibility, that he never hesitated on any occasion, great or small, to make a foray among his characters, and catch them up to show them to the reader and tell him how beautiful or ugly they were; and cry out over their amazing properties." This sweeping condemnation of the narrative attitude of one of the best-beloved of the great masters sounds just a little bigoted. It is true, of course, that the strictest artists in fiction, like Guy de Maupassant, prefer to tell their tales impersonally: they leave their characters rigidly alone, and allow the reader to see them without looking through the author's personality. But there is a type of literature wherein the

chief charm for the reader lies in the fact that he is permitted to see things through the author's mind. When we read Charles Lamb's essay on "The South Sea House," we read it not so much to look at the deserted and memorable building as to look at Elia looking at it. Similarly many readers return again and again to "The Newcomes" not so much for the pleasure of seeing London high society as for the pleasure of seeing Thackeray see it. The merit, or the defect, of the method in any case is a question not of rules and regulations but of the tone and quality of the author's mind. Whether or not he may safely obtrude himself into his fictions depends entirely on who he is. This is a matter more of personality than of art: and what might be insufferable with one author may stand as the main merit of another. For instance, the greatest charm of Mr. J. M. Barrie's novels emanates from the author's habit of emphasizing the personal relation between himself and his characters. The author's many-mooded attitude toward Sentimental Tommy is a matter of human interest just as much as anything that Tommy feels himself.

Let us admit, then, in spite of Mr. Howells, that the author of fiction has a right to assert himself as the narrator, provided that he be a person of interest and charm. It remains for us to consider the various moods in which, in such a case, the writer may look upon his story. The self-obliterating author endeavors to hide his own opinion of the characters, in order not to interfere with the reader's independence of judgment concerning them; but the author who writes personally does not hesitate to reveal, nor even to express directly, his admiration of a character's merits or his deprecation of a character's defects. You *will seek* in vain, in studying the fictitious people of Guy

de Maupassant, for any indication of the author's approval or disapproval of them; and there is something very admirable in this absolute impassiveness of art. But on the other hand, there is a certain salutary humanness about an author who loves or hates his characters just as he would love or hate the same sort of people in actual life, and writes about them with the glow of personal emotion. Mr. Barrie often disapproves of Tommy; sometimes he feels forced to scold him; but he loves him for a' that: and we feel instinctively that the hero is the more truthfully delineated for being represented by a friend.

It will be gathered from the foregoing discussion of the various points of view in narrative that no one of them may be pronounced absolutely better than the others. But this much may be said dogmatically: — there is always one best point of view from which to tell any given short-story; and although in planning a novel the author works with far less technical restriction, there is almost always one best point of view from which to tell a given novel. Therefore, it is advisable for the author to determine as early as possible, from a studious consideration of his materials, what is the best point of view from which to tell the story he is planning, and thereafter to contemplate his narrative from that standpoint and that only. Furthermore, the interest of art demands that the point of view selected shall, if possible, be maintained consistently throughout the telling of the story. This, however, is a very difficult matter; and only in very recent years have even the best writers grown to master it. The novels which have been told without a single violation of this principle are very few in number. But the fact remains that any unwarrantable break-down in the point of view

selected diseconomizes the attention of the reader. It is unfortunate, for instance, that Thomas Bailey Aldrich, in "Marjorie Daw," should have found it necessary, after telling almost the entire tale in letters, to shift suddenly to the external point of view and end the story with a few pages of direct narrative. Such an unexpected variation of method startles and to some extent disrupts the attention of the reader, and thereby detracts from the effect of the thing to be conveyed.

Mr. Henry James and Mr. Kipling exhibit, in their several ways, extraordinary mastery of point of view; and their works may very profitably be studied for examples of this special phase of artistry in narrative. The very title of Mr. James' "What Maisie Knew" proclaims the rigidly restricted standpoint from which the narrative material is seen. In Mr. Kipling's recent tale, "A Deal in Cotton," which appeared in *Collier's Weekly* for Christmas, 1907, the interest is derived chiefly from the trick of telling the story twice,—first from the point of view of Adam Strickland, and the second time from the point of view of Adam's native body-servant, who knew many matters that were hidden from his master.

In certain special cases the point of view has been made, so to speak, the real hero of the story. Some years ago Mr. Brander Matthews, in collaboration with the late H. C. Bunner, devised a very clever narrative entitled "The Documents in the Case." It consisted merely of a series of numbered documents, widely different in nature, presented with neither introduction nor comment by the authors. The series contained clippings from various newspapers, personal letters, I. O. U's, race-track reports, pawn-tickets, letter-heads, telegrams, theater programs, advertisements, receipted bills, envelopes, etc. In

spite of the diversity of these materials, the authors succeeded in fabricating a narrative which was entirely coherent and at all points clear. The main interest, however, lay in the novelty and cleverness of the point of view; and though such an exaggerated technical expedient may be serviceable now and then for a special sort of story, it is not of any general value. A point of view that attracts attention to itself necessarily distracts attention from the story that is being represented; and in a narrative of serious import, the main emphasis should be thrown upon the thing that is told rather than upon the way of telling it.

CHAPTER VIII

EMPHASIS IN NARRATIVE

THE features of any object that we contemplate may with intelligent judgment be divided into two classes, according as they are inherently essential, or else merely contributory, to the existence of that object as an individual entity. If any one of its inherently essential features should be altered, that object would cease to be itself and would become another object; but if any or all of its merely contributory features should be changed, the object would still retain its individuality, however much its aspect might be altered. And in general it may be said that we do not understand an object until we are able to set intelligently in one group or the other every feature it presents to our attention.

In contemplating natural objects, it is often difficult to distinguish those features which are merely contributory from those which are inherently essential; but it ought not to be difficult to do so in contemplating a work of art. For it is possible for the artist — in fact it is incumbent upon him — to help the observer to distinguish clearly between the essential and the contributory details of the object he has fabricated. By employing certain technical expedients in exhibiting his work, the artist is able to communicate to the observer his own intelligent distinction between its more important, and its less important, features. He does this by casting emphasis upon the necessary details and gathering out of emphasis the subsidiary ones.

of the principle of emphasis is recog-
; for it is only by an application of this
artist can gather and group in the
ubsidiary elements of his work, while
d relief those elements that embody the
ing he has to say. The halo with which
nosaicists surrounded the faces of their
y of golden light that gleams about the
in heaven in Tintoretto's decorations, the
alls of the Doge's palace undermined by
hadowy arcades, the refrain of a Provençal
p shadow under the visor of Verrocchio's
tatue, the thought-provoking chiaroscuro of
figure paintings — these expedients are all
ttract attention to the essential elements of
many parts. By technical devices such as
phasis must be given to the central truth of a
rt in order that the observer may not look instead
ere accidents of its investiture. Where many
are gathered together for the purpose of repre-
an idea, some of them must be more important
e others because they are to a greater extent imbued
inherently; and the artist will fail of his purpose
he indicates clearly which elements are essential
ich are merely subsidiary.

ly any other work of art, excepting a Gothic
l or a theatrical performance, is made of elements
ultifarious than those of a fictitious narrative.
ails of a novel are so many and so various that
eeds at all times a nice understanding and a
cation of the principle of emphasis. It is
isable that the present chapter should be de-
numeration and illustration of the different

technical devices which are employed by artists in narrative to cast the needed emphasis on the essential features of their stories.

First of all, it is obviously easy to emphasize by position. In any narrative, or section of a narrative, that is designed to be read in a single sitting, the last moments are of necessity emphatic because they are the last. When the reader lays the narrative aside, he remembers most vividly the last thing that has been presented to his attention; and if he thinks back to the earlier portions of the story, he must do so by thinking through the concluding passage. Therefore, it is necessary in the short-story, and advisable in the chapters of a novel, to reserve for the ultimate position one of the most inherently important features of the narrative; for surely it is bad art to waste the natural emphasis of position by casting it upon a subsidiary feature.

The importance of this simple expedient will readily be recognized if the student will gather together a hundred short-stories written by acknowledged masters and examine the last paragraph of each. Consider for a moment the final sentences of "Markheim," which we have already quoted in another connection:—

"He confronted the maid upon the threshold with something like a smile.

"'You had better go for the police,' said he: 'I have killed your master.'"

The entire story is summed up in the concluding phrase; and the final sentence rings ever after in the reader's memory.

Here, to cite a new example, is the conclusion of Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death":—

"And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red *Death*. He had come like a thief in the night. And one

by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all."

The sense of absolute ruin which we derive from this impressive paragraph is, to a considerable extent, due to the emphasis it gains from its finality. The effect would unquestionably be subtracted from, if another paragraph should be appended and should steal away its importance of position.

In order to derive the utmost emphasis from the terminal position, the great artist Guy de Maupassant, in his short-stories, developed a periodicity of structure by means of which he reserved the solution of the narrative, whenever possible, until the final sentences. This periodic structure is employed, for example, in his well-known story of "The Necklace" ("*La Parure*"). It deals with a poor woman who loses a diamond necklace that she has borrowed from a rich friend in order to wear at a ball. She buys another exactly like it and returns this in its place. For ten years she and her husband labor day and night to pay off the debts they have incurred to purchase the substituted jewels. After the debts are all paid, the woman tells her friend of what had happened. Then follows this last sentence of the story: —

"'Oh, my poor Mathilde. But mine were false. At most they were worth five hundred francs!'"

Next to the last position, the most emphatic place in a brief narrative, or section of a narrative, is of course the first. The mind of the reader receives with an especial vividness whatever is presented to it at the outset. For

this reason it is necessary in the short-story, and advisable in the chapters of a novel, to begin with material that not only is inherently essential but also strikes the key-note of the narrative that is to follow. Edgar Allan Poe is especially artistic in applying this principle of emphasis by initial position. We have already quoted, in another connection, the solemn opening of "The Fall of the House of Usher," with its suggestion of immitigable gloom of setting as the dominant note of the narrative. In "The Cask of Amontillado," wherein the thing to be emphasized is the element of action, Poe begins with this sentence: "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge": and we know already that the story is to set forth a signal act of vengeance. In "The Tell-Tale Heart," which is a study of murderous madness, and deals primarily with the element of character, the author opens thus: —

"True! — nervous — very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses — not destroyed — not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily — how calmly I can tell you the whole story."

In general it may be said that any pause in a narrative emphasizes by position whatever immediately precedes it, and also (though to a considerably less extent) whatever immediately follows it. For this reason many masters of the short-story, like Daudet and de Maupassant, construct their narratives in sections, in order to multiply the *number* of terminal and initial positions. Asterisks

strung across the page not only make the reader aware of the completion of an integral portion of the story, but also focus his attention emphatically on the last thing that has been said before the interruption. The employment of *points de suspension* — a mark of punctuation consisting of a series of successive dots . . . — which is so frequent with French authors, is a device which is used to interrupt a sentence solely for the sake of emphasis by pause.

The instances which we have selected to illustrate the expedient of emphasizing by position have been chosen for convenience from short-stories; but the same principle may be applied with similar success in constructing the chapters of a novel. Certain great but inartistic novelists, like Sir Walter Scott, show themselves to be singularly obtuse to the advantage of placing emphatic material in an emphatic position. Scott is almost always careless of his chapter endings: he allows the sections of his narrative to drift and straggle, instead of rounding them to an emphatic close. But more artistic novelists, like Victor Hugo for example, never fail to take advantage of the terminal position. Consider the close of Book XI, Chapter II, of "Notre Dame de Paris." The gypsy-girl, Esmeralda, has been hanged in the Place de Grève. The hunchback, Quasimodo, has flung the archdeacon, Claude Frollo, from the tower-top of Notre Dame. This paragraph then brings the chapter to an end: —

"Quasimodo then raised his eye to the gypsy, whose body he saw, depending from the gibbet, shudder afar under her white robe with the last tremblings of death-agony; then he lowered it to the archdeacon, stretched out at the foot of the tower and no longer having human form; and he said with a sob that made his deep chest heave: 'Oh! all that I have loved!'"

A chapter ending may be artistically planned either (as in the foregoing instance) to sum up with absolute finality the narrative accomplishment of the chapter, or else, by vaguely foreshadowing the subsequent progress of the story, to lure the reader to proceed. The elder Dumas possessed in a remarkable degree the faculty of so terminating one chapter as to allure the reader to an immediate commencement of the next. He did this most frequently by introducing a new thread of narrative in a phrase of the concluding sentence, and thereby exciting the reader's curiosity to follow up the thread.

The expedient of emphasis by terminal and by initial position cannot, of course, be applied without reservation to an entire novel. The last chapter of a novel with a complicated plot is often of necessity devoted to tying or untying minor knots in the straggling threads of the general network. Therefore, the most emphatic place in an extended narrative is not at the very end, but rather at the close of the chapter which sets forth the culmination. Also, although many great novels, like "The Scarlet Letter," have begun at an emphatic moment in the plot, many others have opened slowly and have presented no important material until the narrative was well under way. "The Talisman" of Scott, "The Spy" of Fenimore Cooper, and many another early nineteenth-century romance, began with a solitary horseman whom the reader was forced to follow for several pages before anything whatever happened. Latterly, however, novelists have learned from writers of short-stories the art of opening emphatically with material important to the plot.

Another means of emphasis in narrative is by proportion. More time and more attention should be given to *essential* scenes than to matters of subsidiary interest.

The most important characters should be given most to say and do; and the amount of attention devoted to the others should be proportioned to their importance in the action. Becky Sharp stands out sharply from the half a hundred other characters in "Vanity Fair," because more time is devoted to her than to any of the others. Similarly, in "Emma" and "Pride and Prejudice," as we have noted in the preceding chapter, the heroine is in each case emphasized by the fact that she is set forth from a more intimate point of view than the minor people in the story. It is wise, for the sake of emphasis by proportion, to draw the major characters more completely and more carefully than the minor; and much may therefore be said, on this ground, in defense of Dickens' habit of drawing humanly only the leading characters in his novels and merely sketching in caricature the subsidiary actors.

It is sometimes possible, in special cases, to emphasize ironically by inverse proportion. An author may deliberately devote several successive pages to dwelling on subsidiary matters, only to emphasize sharply a sudden paragraph or sentence in which he turns to the one thing that really counts. But this ironical expedient is, of course, less frequently serviceable than that of emphasis by direct proportion.

Undoubtedly the easiest means of inculcating a detail of narrative is to repeat it again and again. Emphasis by iteration is a favorite device of Dickens. The reader is never allowed to forget the catch-phrase of Micawber or the moral look of Pecksniff. In many cases, to be sure, the reader wishes that he might escape the constantly recurrent repetition; but Dickens occasionally applies the expedient with subtle emotional effect. In

"A Tale of Two Cities," for example, the repeated references to echoing footsteps and to the knitting of Madame Defarge contribute a great deal to the sense of imminent catastrophe.

Certain modern authors have developed a phase of emphasis by iteration which is similar to the employment of the *leit-motiv* in the music-dramas of Richard Wagner. In the Wagnerian operas a certain musical theme is devoted to each of the characters, and is woven into the score whenever the character appears. Similarly, in the later plays of Henrik Ibsen, certain phrases are repeated frequently, to indicate the recurrence of certain dramatic moods. Thus, in "Rosmersholm," reference is made to the weird symbol of "white horses," whenever the mood of the momentary scene foreshadows the double suicide which is to terminate the play. Students of "Hedda Gabler" need not be reminded of the emphasis flung by iteration on the phrases, "Vine-leaves in his hair," "Fancy that, Hedda!" "Wavy-haired Thea," "The one cock on the fowl-roost," and "People don't do such things!" The same device may be employed just as effectively in the short-story and the novel. A single instance will suffice for illustration. Notice, in examining the impressive talk of the old lama in Mr. Kipling's "Kim," how much emphasis is derived from the continual recurrence of certain phrases, like the "Search for the River," "the justice of the Wheel," "to acquire merit," and so forth.

A narrative expedient scarcely distinguishable in effect from simple iteration is the device of parallelism of structure. For example, in Hawthorne's story of "The White Old Maid," the first scene and the last, although they are separated in time by many, many years, take place in the *same* spacious chamber, with the moonbeams falling in

the same way through two deep and narrow windows, while waving curtains produce the same ghostly semblance of expression on a face that is dead.

Emphasis in narrative is also attained by antithesis, — an expedient employed in every art. In most stories it is well so to select the characters that they will set each other off by contrast. In the great duel scene of the "Master of Ballantrae," from which a selection has been quoted in a previous chapter, the phlegmatic calm of Mr. Henry is contrasted sharply with the mercurial hot-headedness of the Master; and each character stands forth more vividly because of its opposition to the other. Of the two women who are loved by Tito Melema, the one, Tessa, is simple and childish, the other, Romola, complex and intellectual. The most interesting stories present a constant contrast of mutually foiling personalities; and whenever characters of varied views and opposing aims come nobly to the grapple in a struggle that vitally concerns them, the tensity of the situation will be augmented if the difference between the characters is marked. This expedient is therefore of especial importance in the drama. Othello seems more poignantly emotional in the presence of the coldly intellectual Iago. In "The School for Scandal," Charles and Joseph Surface are much more effective together than either of them would be alone. The whole-hearted and happy-go-lucky recklessness of the one sets off the smooth and smug dissimulation of the other; the first gives light to the play, and the second shade. Hamlet's wit is sharpened by the garrulous obtuseness of Polonius; the sad world-wisdom of Paula Tanqueray is accentuated by the innocence of Ellean. Similarly, to return to the novel for examples, we need only instance the contrast in mind between Sherlock Holmes and Dr.

Watson, the contrast in mood between Claude Frollo and Phœbus de Châteaupers, the contrast in ideals between Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Grandcourt.

The expedient of antithesis is also employed effectively in the balance of scene against scene. The absolute desolation which terminates "The Masque of the Red Death" is preceded by "a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence." In Scott's "Kenilworth," we pass from the superb festivities which Leicester institutes in honor of Queen Elizabeth, to the lonely prison where Amy Robsart, his discarded wife, is languishing. Victor Hugo is, in modern fiction, the greatest master of antithesis of mood between scene and scene. His most emphatic effects are attained, like those of Gothic architecture, by a juxtaposition of the grotesque and the sublime. Often, to be sure, he overworks the antithetic; and entire sections of his narrative move like the walking-beam of a ferry-boat, tilting now to this side, now to that. But in spite of his excess in employing this device, his practice should be studied carefully; for at his best he illustrates more convincingly than any other author the effectiveness of emphasis by contrast.

The subtlest way of employing this expedient is to present an antithesis of mood within a single scene. Dame Quickly's account of Falstaff's death touches at once the heights of humor and the depths of pathos. At the close of "Mrs. Bathurst," the tragic narrative is interrupted by the passage of a picnic-party singing a light love-song. Shylock, in his great dialogue with Tubal, is at the same moment plunged in melancholy over the defection of his daughter and flushed with triumph because he has Antonio at last within his clutches. Each emotion seems more *potent* because it is contrasted with the other. In Mr.

Kipling's "'Love-o'-Women,'" the tragic effect is enhanced by the fact that the tale is told by the humorous Mulvaney. Thus: —

"'An' now?' she sez, lookin' at him; an' the red paint stud lone on the white av her face like a bull's-eye on a target.

"He lifted up his eyes, slow an' very slow, an' he looked at her long an' very long, an' he tuk his spache betune his teeth wid a wrench that shuk him.

"'I'm dyin', Aigypt — dyin',' he says; ay, those were his words, for I remimber the name he called her. He was turnin' the death-color, but his eyes niver rowled. They were set — set on her. Widout word or warnin' she opened her arms full stretch, an' 'Here!' she sez. (Oh, fwhat a golden mericle av a voice ut was.) 'Die here,' she sez; an' Love-o'-Women dhropped forward, an' she hild him up, for she was a fine big woman."

Another rhetorical expedient from which emphasis may be derived is, of course, the use of climax. The materials of a short-story, or of a chapter of narrative, should in nearly every case be assembled in an ascending order of importance, — each incident carrying the interest to a higher level than that of the preceding. The same is true of the structure of a novel from the outset to the moment of the culmination; but of course it is rarely possible in the *dénouement* to carry the interest any higher than the level it attained at the point of greatest complication. Climacteric progressiveness of structure is effectively exhibited in Mr. Henry James' tale of mystery and terror, "The Turn of the Screw." The author on horror's head horrors accumulates, in a steadily ascending scale. But, on the other hand, many stories have been marred by the introduction of a very striking scene too early in

the structure, after which there has succeeded of necessity an appreciable diminution in the interest. The reason why sequels to great novels have rarely been successful is that it has been impossible for the author in the second volume to sustain a climacteric rise of interest from the level where he left off in the first.

A means of emphasis less technical and more psychological than those which have been hitherto discussed is that which owes its origin to surprise. Whatever hits the reader unexpectedly will hit him hard. He will be most impressed by that for which he has been least prepared. Chapter XXXII of "Vanity Fair" passes in Brussels during the battle of Waterloo. The reader is kept in the city with the women of the story while the men are fighting on the field a dozen miles away. All day a distant cannonading rumbles on the ear. At nightfall the noise stops suddenly. Then, at the end of the chapter, the reader is told: —

"No more firing was heard at Brussels — the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and city: and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart."

This statement of George Osborne's death is emphasized in several ways at once. It is made emphatic by position, since it is placed at the very end of a long chapter; by inverse proportion, since it is set forth in a single phrase after many pages that have been devoted to less important matters; but most of all by the startle of surprise with which it strikes the reader. Likewise, the last sentence of de Maupassant's "The Necklace," quoted earlier in this chapter, is emphatic by surprise as well as by position; and the same is true of the clever and unexpected close of H. C. Bunner's "A Sisterly Scheme," *in* many ways a little masterpiece of art.

In tales of mystery, the interest is maintained chiefly by the deft manipulation of surprise; but even in novels wherein the aim to mystify is very far from being the primary purpose of the author, it is often wise to keep a secret from the reader for the sake of the emphasis by surprise which may be derived at the moment of revelation. In "Our Mutual Friend" the reader is led for a long time to suppose that the character of Mr. Boffin is changing for the worse; and his interest is stimulated keenly when he discovers ultimately that the apparent degeneration has been only a pretense.

In the drama this expedient must be used with great delicacy, because a sudden and startling shock of surprise is likely to scatter the attention of the spectators and flurry them out of a true conception of the scene. The reader of a novel, when he discovers with surprise that he has been skilfully deceived through several pages, may pause to reconstruct his conception of the narrative, and may even re-read the entire passage through which the secret has been withheld from him. But in the theater, the spectators cannot stop the play while they reconstruct in retrospect their judgment of a situation; and therefore, in the drama, a moment of surprise should be carefully led up to by anticipatory suggestion. Before Lady Macbeth is disclosed walking in her sleep, her doctor and her waiting-gentlewoman are sent on to tell the audience of her "slumbery agitation." This is excellent art in the theater; but it would be bad art in the pages of a novel. In a story written to be read, surprise is most effective when it is complete.

An even more interesting form of emphasis in narrative is emphasis by suspense. Wilkie Collins is accredited with having said that the secret of holding the attention

of one's readers lay in the ability to do three things: "Make 'em laugh; make 'em weep; make 'em wait." Still abide these three; and the greatest is the last. The ability to make the reader wait, through many pages and at times through many chapters, is a very valuable asset of the writer of fiction; but this ability is applied to best advantage when it is exercised within certain limitations. In the first place, there is no use in making the reader wait unless he is first given an inkling of what he is to wait for. The reader should be tantalized; he should be made to long for the fruit that is just beyond his grasp; and he should not be left in ignorance as to the nature of the fruit, lest he should long for it half-heartedly. A vague sense of "something evermore about to be" is not as interesting to the reader as a vivid sense of the imminence of some particular occurrence that he wishes ardently to witness. The expedient of suspense is most effective when either of two things and only two, both of which the reader has imagined in advance, is just about to happen, and the reader, desirous of the one and apprehensive of the other, is kept waiting while the balance trembles. In the second place, there is seldom any use in making the reader wait unless he is given in the end the thing he has been waiting for. A short-story may occasionally set forth a suspense which is never to be satisfied. Frank R. Stockton's famous tale, "The Lady or the Tiger?", ends with a question which neither the reader nor the author is able to answer; and Bayard Taylor's fascinating short-story, "Who Was She?", never reveals the alluring secret of the heroine's identity. But in an extended story an unsatisfied suspense is often less emphatic than no suspense at all, because the reader in the end feels cheated by the author who has made him

wait for nothing. There are, of course, exceptions to this statement. In "The Marble Faun," Hawthorne is undoubtedly right in never revealing the shape of Donatello's ears, even though the reader continually expects the revelation; but, in the same novel, it is difficult to see what, if anything, is gained by making the reader wait in vain for the truth about the shadowy past of Miriam.

Emphasis in narrative may also be attained by imitative movement. Whatever is imagined to have happened quickly should be narrated quickly, in few words and in rapid rhythm; and whatever is imagined to have happened slowly should be narrated in a more leisurely manner, — sometimes in a greater number of words than are absolutely necessitated by the sense alone, — the words being arranged, furthermore, in a rhythm of appreciable sluggishness. In "Markheim," the dealer is murdered in a single sudden sentence: "The long, skewerlike dagger flashed and fell." But, later on in the story, it takes the hero a whole paragraph, containing no less than three hundred words, to mount the four-and-twenty steps to the first floor of the house. In the following passage from "The Masque of the Red Death," notice how much of the effect is due to imitative movement in the narrative: —

"But from a certain nameless awe with which the mad assumptions of the mummer had inspired the whole party, there were found none who put forth hand to seize him; so that, unimpeded, he passed within a yard of the Prince's person; and, while the vast assembly, as if with one impulse, shrank from the centers of the rooms to the walls, he made his way uninterruptedly, but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the blue chamber to the purple —

through the purple to the green — through the green to the orange — through this again to the white — and even thence to the violet, ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him. It was then, however, that the Prince Prospero, maddening with rage and the shame of his own momentary cowardice, rushed hurriedly through the six chambers, while none followed him on account of a deadly terror that had seized upon all." The specter and the Prince pass successively through the same series of rooms; but it takes the former fifty-one words to cover the distance, whereas it takes the latter only six.

In every story that is artistically fashioned, the methods of emphasis enumerated in this chapter will be found to be continually applied. Its essential features will be rendered prominent by position (terminal or initial), by proportion (direct or inverse), by iteration or parallelism, by antithesis, by climax, by surprise, by suspense, by imitative movement, or by a combination of any or all of these. The necessity of emphasis is ever present; the means of emphasis are simple; and any writer of narrative who knows his art will endeavor to employ them always to the best advantage.

CHAPTER IX

THE EPIC, THE DRAMA, AND THE NOVEL

THROUGHOUT the present volume, the word *fiction* has been used with a very broad significance, to include every type of literary composition whose purpose is to embody certain truths of human life in a series of imagined facts. The reason for this has been that the same general artistic methods, with very slight and obvious modifications, are applicable to every sort of narrative which sets forth imagined people in a series of imagined acts. Nearly all of the technical principles which have been outlined in the six preceding chapters apply not only to the novel and the short-story, but likewise to the epic and the lesser narrative in verse, and also (though with certain evident limitations) to the drama. The materials and methods of fiction may be studied in the works of Homer, Shakespeare, and even Browning, as well as in the works of Balzac, Turgénieff, and Mr. Kipling. The nature of narrative is necessarily the same, whatever be its mood or its medium. The methods of constructing plots, of delineating characters, of employing settings, do not differ appreciably whether a narrative be written in verse or in prose; and in either case the same selection of point of view and variety of emphasis are possible. Therefore, in this volume, no attempt has hitherto been made to distinguish one type of fictitious narrative from another.

Such a distinction, if it be attempted at all, should be made only on the broadest and most general lines. First

of all, it should be admitted that, in an inquiry concerned solely with the methods of fiction, no technical distinction is possible between the narrative that is written in verse and the narrative that is written in prose. The two differ in the mood of their materials and the medium through which they are expressed; but they do not differ distinctly in methods of construction. As far as plot and characters and setting are concerned, Sir Walter Scott went to work in the Waverley Novels, which are written in prose, just as he had gone to work in "Marmion" and "The Lady of the Lake," which are written in verse. In his verse he said things with the better art, in his prose he had more things to say; but in each case his central purpose was the same: and nothing can be gained from a critical dictum that "Ivanhoe" is fiction and that "Marmion" is not. In the history of every nation, fiction has been written earliest in verse and only afterwards in prose. What we loosely call the novel was developed late in literature, at a time after prose had supplanted verse as the natural medium for narrative. Therefore, and therefore only, have we come to regard the novel as a type of prose literature. For there is no inherent reason why a novel may not be written in verse. There is a sense in which Mrs. Browning's "Aurora Leigh," Owen Meredith's "Lucile," and Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House," to mention works of very different quality and caliber, may be regarded more properly as novels than as poems. The story of "Maud" inspired Tennyson to poetic utterance, and he told the tale in a series of exquisite lyrics; but the same story might have been used by a different author as the basis for a novel in prose. The subject of "Evangeline" was suggested to Longfellow by Hawthorne; and if *the* great prose poet had written the story himself, it would

not have differed essentially in material or in structural method from the narrative as we know it through the medium of the verse romancer. M. François Coppée has composed admirable short-stories in verse as well as in prose. "The Strike of the Iron-Workers" ("*La Grève des Forgerons*"), which is written in rhymed Alexandrines, does not differ markedly in narrative method from "The Substitute" ("*Le Remplaçant*"), which is written in prose. To be sure, the former is a poem and the latter is not; but only a very narrow-minded critic would call the latter a short-story without applying the same term also to the former. Therefore, the question whether a certain fictitious tale should be told in verse or in prose has no place in a general discussion of the materials and methods of fiction. It is a matter of expression merely, and must be decided in each case by the temperamental attitude of the author toward his subject-matter.

Eliminating, therefore, as unprofitable any attempt at a critical distinction between fiction that is written in verse and fiction that is written in prose, we may yet derive a certain profit from a distinction along broad and general lines between three leading moods of fiction, — the epic, the dramatic, and what (lacking a more precise term) we may call the novelistic. Certain materials of fiction are inherently epic, or dramatic, or novelistic, as the case may be. Also, an author, according to his mental attitude toward life and toward the subject-matter of his fictions, may cast his stories either in the epic, the dramatic, or the novelistic mood. In order to understand this distinction, we must examine the nature of the epic and the drama, and then study the novel in comparison with these two elder types of fiction.

The great epics of the world, whether, as in the case of

the Norse sagas and possibly of the Homeric poems, they have been a gradual and undeliberate aggregation of traditional ballads, or else, as in the case of the "Æneid" and "Paradise Lost," they have been the deliberate production of a single conscious artist, have attained their chief significance from the fact that they have summed up within themselves the entire contribution to human progress of a certain race, a certain nation, a certain organized religion. The glory that was Greece is epitomized and sung forever in the "Iliad,"—the grandeur that was Rome, in the "Æneid." All that the Middle Ages gave the world is gathered and expressed in the "Divine Comedy" of Dante: all of medieval history, science, philosophy, scholarship, poetry, religion may be reconstructed from a right reading and entire understanding of this single monumental poem. If you would know Portugal in her great age of discovery and conquest and national expansion, read the "Lusiads" of Camoëns. If you would know Christianity militant against the embattled legions of the Saracens, read the "Jerusalem Liberated" of Tasso. If you would know what the Puritan religion once meant to the greatest minds of England, read the "Paradise Lost" of Milton.

The great epics have attained this resumptive and historical significance only by exhibiting as subject-matter a vast and communal struggle, in which an entire race, an entire nation, an entire organized religion has been concerned, — a struggle imagined as so vast that it has shaken heaven as well as earth and called to conflict not only men but also gods. The epic has dealt always with a struggle, at once human and divine, to establish a great communal cause. This cause, in the "Æneid," is the founding of Rome; in the "Jerusalem Liberated" it is

the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre; in the "Faerie Queene" it is the triumph of the virtues over the vices; in the "Lusiads" it is the discovery and conquest of the Indies; in the "Divine Comedy" it is the salvation of the human soul. Whatever nations, whatever races, whatever gods oppose the founding of Rome or the liberation of Jerusalem must be conquered, because in either case the epic cause is righteous and predestined to prevail.

As a result of this, the characters in the great epics are memorable mainly because of the part that they play in advancing or retarding the victory of the vast and social cause which is the subject of the story. Their virtues and their faults are communal and representative: they are not adjudged as individuals, apart from the conflict in which they figure: and, as a consequence, they are rarely interesting in their individual traits. It is in rendering the more intimate and personal phases of human character that epic literature shows itself, when compared with the modern novel, inefficient. The epic author exhibits little sympathy for any individual who struggles against the cause that is to be established. Æneas' dallying with Dido and subsequent desertion of her is of little interest to Virgil on the ground of individual personality: what interests him mainly is that so long as Æneas lingers with the Carthaginian queen, the founding of Rome is being retarded, and that when at last Æneas leaves her, he does so to advance the epic cause. Therefore Virgil regards the desertion of Dido as an act of heroic virtue on the part of the man who sails away to found a nation. A modern novelist, however (and this is the main point to be considered in this connection), would conceive the whole matter more personally. He would be far less interested at the moment in the ultimate founding of Rome

than he would be in the misery of the deserted woman; and instead of considering Æneas as a model of heroic virtue, would adjudge him as personally base. From this we see that the novelistic attitude toward character is much more intimate than the epic attitude. The wrath of Achilles is significant to Homer, not so much because it is an exhibition of individual personality as because it is a factor in jeopardizing the victory of the Greeks. Considered as types of individual character, most of Homer's heroes are mere boys. It is the cause for which they fight that gives them dignity: embattled Greece must repossess the beauty which a lesser race has reft away from it. Even Helen herself is merely an idea to be fought for; she is not, as a woman, interesting humanly. It is only in infrequent passages, such as the scene of parting between Andromache and Hector, that the ancient epics reveal the intimate attitude toward character to which we have grown accustomed in the modern novel.

Because the epic authors have been interested always in communal conflict rather than in individual personality, they have seldom made any use of the element of love, — the most intimate and personal of all emotions. There is no love in Homer, and scarcely any love in Virgil and in Milton. Tasso, to be sure, uses a love motive as the basis for each of the three leading strands of his story; but because of this, his epic, though gaining in modernity and charm, loses something of the communal immensity — the impersonal dignity — of the "Iliad" and the "Æneid." On the other hand, novelistic authors, since they have been interested mainly in the revelation of intimate phases of individual personality, have seized upon the element of love as the leading motive of their

stories. And this is one of the main differences, on the side of content, between epic and novelistic fiction.

Certain great works of fiction stand upon the borderland between the epic and the novel. "Don Quixote" is, for instance, such a work. It is epic in that it sums up and expresses the entire contribution of Spain to the progress of humanity. It is resumptive of the nation that produced it: all phases of Spanish life and character, ideals and temperament, are epitomized within it. But, on the other hand, it is novelistic in the emphasis it casts on individual personality, — the intimacy with which it focuses the interest not so much upon a nation as upon a man.

The epic, in the ancient sense, is dead to-day. Facility of intercommunication between the nations has made us all citizens of the world; and an increased sense of the relativity of national and religious ideals has made us catholic of other systems than our own. Consequently we have lost belief in a communal conflict so absolutely just and necessary as to call to battle powers not only human but divine. Also, since the French Revolution, we have grown to set the one above the many, and to believe that, of right, society exists for the sake of the individual rather than the individual for the sake of society. Therefore the novel, which deals with individual personality in and for itself, is more attuned to modern life than the epic, which presents the individual mainly in relation to a communal cause which he strives to advance or to retard.

The epic note, however, survives in certain momentous modern novels. "Uncle Tom's Cabin," for example, is less important merely as a novel than as the epic of the great cause of abolition. Underlying many of the works

of Erckmann-Chatrian is an epic purpose to advance the cause of universal peace by a depiction of the horrors of war. Balzac had in mind the resumptive phase of epic composition when he planned his "Human Comedy" (choosing his title in evident imitation of that of Dante's poem), and started out to sum up all phases of human life in a single monumental series of narratives. So also the late Frank Norris had an epic idea in his imagination when he planned a trilogy of novels (which unhappily he died before completing) to exhibit what the great wheat industry means to the modern world.

In the broad and social sense, the epic is undeniably a greater type of fiction than the novel, because it is more resumptive of life in the large, and looks upon humanity with a vaster sweep of vision; but in the deep and personal sense, the novel is the greater, because it is more capable of an intimate study of individual emotion. And it is possible, as we have seen, that modern fiction should be at once epic and novelistic in content and in mood, — epic in resuming all aspects of a certain phase of life and in exhibiting a social struggle, and novelistic in casting emphasis upon personal details of character and in depicting intimate emotions. Probably no other author has succeeded better than Emile Zola in combining the epic and the novelistic moods of fiction; and the novels in the Rougon-Macquart series are at once communal and personal in their significance.

It is somewhat simpler to trace a distinction both in content and in mood between novelistic and dramatic fiction, because the latter is produced under special conditions which impose definite limitations upon the author. A drama is, in essence, a story devised to be presented by actors on a stage before an audience. The dramatist,

therefore, works ever under the sway of three influences to which the novelist is not submitted: — namely, the temperament of the actors by whom his plays are to be performed, the physical conditions of the theater in which they are to be produced, and the psychologic nature of the audience before which they are to be presented. The combined force of these three external influences upon the dramatist accounts for all of the essential differences between the drama and the novel.

First of all, because of the influence of his actors, the dramatist is obliged to draw character through action, and to eliminate from his work almost every other means of characterization. He must therefore select from life such moments as are active rather than passive. His characters must constantly be doing something; they may not pause for careful contemplation. Consequently the novelist has a wider range of subject than the dramatist, because he is able to consider life more calmly, and to concern himself, if need be, with thoughts and feelings that do not translate themselves into action. In depicting objective events in which the element of action is paramount, the drama is more immediate and vivid; but the novel may depict subjective events which are quite beyond the presentation of actors in a theater. Furthermore, since he is not obliged to think of actors, the novelist has a greater freedom in creating characters than the dramatist. The great characters of the drama have been devised by playwrights who have already attained command of the theater of their place and time, and who therefore have fashioned their parts to fit the individual actors they have found ready to perform them. Consequently they have endowed their characters with the physical, and even to some extent the mental, character-

istics of certain actual actors. M. Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac is not merely Cyrano, but also M. Constant Coquelin; M. Sardou's La Tosca is not merely La Tosca, but also Mme. Sarah Bernhardt; Molière's Célimène is not merely Célimène, but also Mlle. Molière; Shakespeare's Hamlet is not merely Hamlet, but also Richard Burbage. In working thus with one eye upon the actual, the dramatist is extremely likely to be betrayed into untruthfulness. In the last scene of "Hamlet," the Queen says of the Prince, "He's fat and scant of breath." This line was of course occasioned by the fact that Richard Burbage was corpulent during the season of 1602. But the eternal truth is that Prince Hamlet is a slender man; and Shakespeare has here been forced to belie the truth in order to subserve the fact. On the other hand, the dramatist is undoubtedly aided in his great aim of creating characters by holding in mind certain actual people who have been selected to represent them; and what the novelist gains in range and freedom of characterization, he is likely to lose in concreteness of delineation.

Secondly, the form and structure of the drama in any age is imposed upon the dramatist by the size and shape and physical appointments of the theater he is writing for. Plays must be built in one way to fit the theater of Dionysius, in another way to fit the Globe upon the Bankside, in still another way to fit the modern electric-lighted stage behind a picture-frame proscenium. The dramatist, in constructing his story, is hedged in by a multitude of physical restrictions, of which he must make a special study in order to force them to contribute to the presentation of his truth instead of detracting from it. In this regard, again, the novelist works with greater *freedom*. Seldom is his labor subjected to merely physi-

cal restrictions from without. Sometimes, to be sure, certain arbitrary conditions of the trade of publishing have exercised an influence over the structure of the novel. In England, early in the nineteenth century, it was easier to sell a three-volume novel than a tale of lesser compass; and many a story of the time had to be pieced out beyond its natural and truthful length in order to meet the demands of the public and the publishers. But such a case, in the history of the novel, is exceptional. In general, the novelist may build as he chooses. He may tell a tale, long or short, happening in few places or in many; and is not, like the dramatist, confined in place to no more than four or five different settings, and in time to the two hours' traffic of the stage. The novel, therefore, is far more serviceable than the drama as a medium for exhibiting the gradual growth of character, — the development of personality under influences extending over long periods of time and exerted in many different places.

Thirdly, the very content of the drama is determined by the fact that a play must be devised to interest a multitude rather than an individual. The novelist writes for a reader sitting alone in his library: whether ten such readers or a hundred thousand ultimately read a book, the author speaks to each of them apart from all the others. But the dramatist must plan his story to interest simultaneously a multitude of heterogeneous observers. The drama, therefore, must be richer in popular appeal; but the novel may be subtler in appealing to the one instead of to the many. Since the novelist addresses himself to a single person only, or to a limitless succession of single persons, he may choose the sort of reader he will write for; but the dramatist must please the many, and is therefore at the mercy of the multitude. He writes less freely than the

novelist, since he cannot pick his auditors. His themes, his thoughts, and his emotions are restricted by the limits of popular appreciation.

This important condition is potent in determining the proper content of dramatic fiction. For it has been found in practice that the only thing that will keenly interest a crowd is a struggle between character and character. Speaking empirically, the late Ferdinand Brunetière, in his preface to "*Annales du Théatre et de la Musique*" for 1893, stated that the drama has dealt always with a struggle between human wills; and his statement, formulated in the catch-phrase, "No struggle, no drama," has since become a commonplace of dramatic criticism. The reason for this is simply that characters are interesting to a crowd mainly in those crises of emotion that bring them to the grapple. A single individual, like the reader of a novel, may be interested intellectually in those gentle influences beneath which a character unfolds itself as mildly as a blowing rose; but to the gathered multitude a character does not appeal except in moments of contention. Hence the drama, to interest at all, must present its characters in some struggle of the wills, — whether it be merely flippant, as in the case of Benedick and Beatrice, or gentle, as in that of Viola and Orsino, or terrible, with Macbeth, or piteous, with Lear. The drama, therefore, is akin to the epic, in that it must represent a struggle; but it is more akin to the novel, in that it deals with human character in its individual, rather than its communal, aspects. But in range of representing characters, the drama is more restricted than the novel; for though the novelist is at liberty to exhibit a struggle of individual human wills whenever he may choose to do so, he is not, like the dramatist, prohibited from representing anything

else. In covering this special province, the drama is undeniably more vivid and emphatic; but many momentous phases of human experience are not contentious but contemplative; and these the novel may reveal serenely, without employment of the sound and fury of the drama.

Since the mind of the multitude is more emotional than intellectual, the dramatist, for his most effective moments, is obliged to set forth action with emotion for its motive. But the novelist, in motivating action, may be more considerate and intellectual, since his appeal is made to the individual mind. In its psychologic processes, the crowd is more commonplace and more traditional than is the individual. The drama, therefore, is less serviceable than the novel as a vehicle for conveying unaccustomed and advanced ideas of life. The crowd has no speculation in its eyes: it is impatient of original thought, and of any but inherited emotion: it evinces little favor for the original, the questioning, the new. Therefore if an author holds ideas of religion, or of politics, or of social law that are in advance of his time, he will do better to embody them in a novel than in a drama; because the former makes its appeal to the individual mind, which has more patience for intellectual consideration.

Furthermore, the novelist need not, like the dramatist, subserve the immediate necessity for popular appeal. The dramatic author, since he plans his story for a heterogeneous multitude of people, must incorporate in the same single work of art elements that will interest all classes of mankind. But the novelistic author, since he is at liberty to pick his auditors at will, may, if he choose, write only for the best-developed minds. It is an element of Shakespeare's greatness that his most momentous plays, like "Hamlet" and "Othello," are of interest to people who

can neither read nor write, as well as to people of educated sensibilities. But it is an evidence of Mr. Meredith's greatness that his novels are caviare to the general. Mr. Kipling's "They" is the greater story because it defends itself from being understood by those it is not really for. In exhibiting the subtler and more delicate phases of human experience, the novel far transcends the drama. The drama, at its deepest, is more poignant; but the novel, at its highest, is more exquisite.

The proper material for the drama is, as we have seen, a struggle between individual human wills, motivated by emotion rather than by intellect, and expressed in terms of objective action. In representing such material, the drama is supreme. But the novel is wider in range; for besides exhibiting (though less emphatically) this special aspect of human life, it may embody many other and scarcely less important phases of individual experience. Of late, an effort has been made to break down the barrier between the novel and the drama: many stories, which have been told first in the novelistic mood, have afterward been reconstructed and retold for presentation in the theater. This attempt has succeeded sometimes, but has more often failed. Yet it ought to be very easy to distinguish a novel that may be dramatized from a novel that may not. Certain scenes in novelistic literature, like the duel in "The Master of Ballantrae," are essentially dramatic both in content and in mood. Such scenes may be adapted with very little labor to the uses of the theater. Certain novels, like "Jane Eyre," which exhibit an emphatic struggle between individual human wills, are inherently capable of theatric representment. But any novel in which the main source of interest is not the clash of character on character, in which the element of action

is subordinate, or in which the chief appeal is made to the individual (instead of the collective) mind, is not capable of being dramatized successfully.

It is impossible to determine whether, at the present day, the novel or the drama is the more effective medium for embodying the truths of human life in a series of imagined facts. Dramatic fiction has the greater depth, and novelistic fiction has the greater breadth. The latter is more extensive, the former more intensive, in its artistry. This much, however, may be decided definitely. The novel, at its greatest, may require a vaster sweep of wisdom on the part of the author; but the drama is technically more difficult, since the dramatist, besides mastering all of the general methods of fiction which he necessarily employs in common with the novelist, must labor in conformity with a special set of conditions to which the novelist is not submitted. Mr. Meredith may be a greater author than Mr. Arthur Wing Pinero; but Mr. Pinero is of necessity more rigid in his mastery of structure.

CHAPTER X

THE NOVEL, THE NOVELETTE, AND THE SHORT-STORY

TURNING our attention from the epic and the drama, and confining it to the general type of fiction which in the last chapter was loosely named novelistic, we shall find it possible to distinugish somewhat sharply, on the basis of both material and method, between three several forms, — the novel, the novelette, and the short-story. The French, who are more precise than we in their use of denotative terms, are accustomed to divide their novelistic fiction into what they call the *roman*, the *nouvelle*, and the *conte*. "Novel" and "novelette" are just as serviceable terms as *roman* and *nouvelle;* in fact, since "novelette" is the diminutive of "novel," they express even more clearly than their French equivalents the relation between the two forms they designate. But it is greatly to be regretted that we do not have in English a distinctive word that is the equivalent of *conte*. Edgar Allan Poe used the word "tale" with similar meaning; but this term is so indefinite and vague that it has been discarded by later critics. It is customary at the present day to use the word "short-story," which Professor Brander Matthews has suggested spelling with a hyphen to indicate that it has a special and technical significance.

The French apply the term *roman* to extensive works like "Notre Dame de Paris" and "Eugénie Grandet"; and they apply the term *nouvelle* to works of briefer compass but similar method, like the "Colomba" and the

"Carmen" of Prosper Mérimée. In English we may class as novels works like "Kenilworth," "The Newcomes," "The Last of the Mohicans," "The Rise of Silas Lapham"; and we may class as novelettes works like "Daisy Miller," "The Treasure of Franchard," "The Light that Failed." The difference is merely that the novelette (or *nouvelle*) is a work of less extent, and covers a smaller canvas, than the novel (or *roman*). The distinction is quantitative but not qualitative. The novelette deals with fewer characters and incidents than the novel; it usually limits itself to a stricter economy of time and place; it presents a less extensive view of life, with (most frequently) a more intensive art. But these differences are not definite enough to warrant its being considered a species distinct from the novel. Except for the restrictions imposed by brevity of compass, the writer of novelettes employs the same methods as the writer of novels; and, furthermore, he sets forth similar materials.

More and more in recent years, the novel has tended to shorten to the novelette. A stricter sense of art has led to the exclusion of digressive and discursive passages; and the hurry and preoccupation of contemporary readers has militated against the leisurely and rambling habit of the authors of an earlier time. The lesson of excision and condensation has been taught by writers as different in tone as Mérimée, Turgénieff, and Stevenson. "The three-volume novel is extinct," as Mr. Kipling stated in the motto prefixed to the poem called "The Three-Decker," in which, with a commingling of satire and sentiment, he chanted its requiem. It was nearly always, in the matter of structure, a slovenly form; and there is therefore little cause for regret that the novelette seems destined to supplant it. For the novelette accomplishes

the same purpose as the novel, with necessarily a more intensive emphasis of art, and with a tax considerably less upon the time and attention of the reader.

But the *conte*, or short-story, differs from the novel and the novelette not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively, not only in length, but also in kind. In such *contes* as "The Necklace" of de Maupassant and "The Last Class" of Daudet, in such short-stories as "Ligeia," "The Ambitious Guest," "Markheim," and "Without Benefit of Clergy," the aim of the author is quite distinct from that of the writer of novels and of novelettes. In material and in method, as well as in extent, these stories represent a type that is noticeably different.

The short-story, as well as the novel and the novelette, has always existed. The parable of "The Prodigal Son," in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, is just as surely a short-story in material and method as the books of "Ruth" and "Esther" are novelettes in form. But the critical consciousness of the short-story as a species of fiction distinct in purpose and in method from the novel dates only from the nineteenth century. It was Edgar Allan Poe who first designated and realized the short-story as a distinct form of literary art. In the scholarly and thorough introduction to his collection of "American Short Stories,"[1] Professor Charles Sears Baldwin points out that Poe, more than any of his predecessors in the art of fiction, felt narrative as structure. It was he who first rejected from the tale everything that was, from the standpoint of narrative form, extraneous, and made the narrative progress more direct. The essential features of his structure were (to use Professor

[1] A contribution to "The Wampum Library"; Longmans, Green & Co., 1904.

Baldwin's words) harmonization, simplification, and gradation. He stripped his stories of every least incongruity. What he taught by his example was reduction to a straight predetermined course; and he made clear to succeeding writers the necessity of striving for unity of impression through strict unity of form.

Poe was a critic as well as a teller of tales; and what he inculcated by example he also stated by precept. In his now famous review of Hawthorne's "Tales," published originally in *Graham's Magazine* for May, 1842, he thus outlined his theory of the species: —

"The ordinary novel is objectionable, from its length, for reasons already stated in substance. As it cannot be read at one sitting, it deprives itself, of course, of the immense force derivable from *totality*. Worldly interests intervening during the pauses of perusal, modify, annul, or counteract, in a greater or less degree, the impressions of the book. But simple cessation in reading would, of itself, be sufficient to destroy the true unity. In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out the fulness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences — resulting from weariness or interruption.

"A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents — he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written,

of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one preëstablished design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel. Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem; but undue length is yet more to be avoided."

From the very outset, the currency of Poe's short-stories was international; and his concrete example in striving for totality of impression exerted an immediate influence not only in America but even more in France. But his abstract theory, which (for obvious reasons) did not become so widely known, was not received into the general body of critical thought until much later in the century. It remained for Professor Brander Matthews, in his well-known essay on "The Philosophy of the Short-story," printed originally in Lippincott's Magazine for October, 1885,[1] to state explicitly what had lain implicit in the passage of Poe's criticism already quoted, and to give a general currency to the theory that the short-story differs from the novel essentially, — and not merely in the matter of length. In the second section of his essay, Professor Matthews stated: —

"A true short-story is something other and something more than a mere story which is short. A true short-story differs from the novel chiefly in its essential unity of impression. In a far more exact and precise use of the word, a short-story has unity as a novel cannot have it.

[1] This paper, later included in "Pen and Ink," 1888, has since been published by itself in a little volume: Longmans, Green & Co., 1901.

Often, it may be noted by the way, the short-story fulfils the three false unities of the French classic drama: it shows one action, in one place, on one day. A short-story deals with a single character, a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation. Poe's paradox that a poem cannot greatly exceed a hundred lines in length under penalty of ceasing to be one poem and breaking into a string of poems, may serve to suggest the precise difference between the short-story and the novel. The short-story is the single effect, complete and self-contained, while the novel is of necessity broken into a series of episodes. Thus the short-story has, what the novel cannot have, the effect of 'totality,' as Poe called it, the unity of impression.

"Of a truth, the short-story is not only not a chapter out of a novel, or an incident or an episode extracted from a longer tale, but at its best it impresses the reader with the belief that it would be spoiled if it were made larger, or if it were incorporated into a more elaborate work. . . .

"In fact, it may be said that no one has ever succeeded as a writer of short-stories who had not ingenuity, originality, and compression; and that most of those who have succeeded in this line had also the touch of fantasy."

On the basis of these theories, the present writer essayed a few years ago to formulate within a single sentence a definition of the short-story. Thus: *The aim of a short-story is to produce a single narrative effect with the greatest economy of means that is consistent with the utmost emphasis.*[1]

Because of its succinctness, this sentence needs a little

[1] This definition was printed first in the *Bookman* for February, 1904, and later in the *Reader* for February, 1906.

explanation. A narrative effect necessarily involves the three elements of action, characters, and setting. In aiming to produce a narrative effect, the short-story, therefore, differs from the sketch, which may concern itself with only one of these elements, without involving the other two. The sketch most often deals with character or setting divested of the element of action; but in the short-story something has to happen. In this regard, the short-story is related more closely to the novel than to the sketch. But although in the novel any two, or all three, of the narrative elements may be so intimately interrelated that no one of them stands out clearly from the others, it is almost always customary in the short-story to cast a marked preponderance of emphasis on one of the elements, to the subversion of the other two. Short-stories, therefore, may be divided into three classes, according as the effect which they purpose to produce is primarily an effect of action, or of character, or of setting. "The Masque of the Red Death" produces an effect of setting, "The Tell-Tale Heart" an effect of character, and "The Cask of Amontillado" an effect of action. For the sake of economy it is incumbent on the author to suggest at the outset which of the three sorts of narrative effect the story is intended to produce. The way in which Poe accomplished this in the three stories just mentioned may be seen at once upon examination of the opening paragraph of each. Having selected his effect, the author of a short-story should confine his attention to producing that, and that alone. He should stop at the very moment when his pre-established design has been attained; and never during the progress of his composition should he turn aside for the sake of a lesser effect not absolutely inherent in his *single* narrative purpose. Stevenson insisted on this

focus of attention in a passage of a personal letter addressed to Mr. Sidney Colvin: —

"Make another end to it? Ah, yes, but that's not the way I write; the whole tale is implied; I never use an effect when I can help it, unless it prepares the effects that are to follow; that's what a story consists in. To make another end, that is to make the beginning all wrong. The *dénouement* of a long story is nothing, it is just 'a full close,' which you may approach and accomplish as you please — it is a coda, not an essential member in the rhythm; but the body and end of a short-story is bone of the bone and blood of the blood of the beginning."

The phrase "single narrative effect," with all its implications, should now be clear. The phrase "with the greatest economy of means" implies that the writer of a short-story should tell his tale with the fewest necessary number of characters and incidents, and should project it in the narrowest possible range of place and time. If he can get along with two characters, he should not use three. If a single event will suffice for his effect, he should confine himself to that. If his story can pass in one place at one time, he must not disperse it over several times and places. But in striving always for the greatest possible conciseness, he must not neglect the equally important need of producing his effect "with the utmost emphasis." If he can gain markedly in emphasis by violating the strictest possible economy, he should do so; for, as Poe stated, undue brevity is exceptionable, as well as undue length. Thus the parable of "The Prodigal Son," which might be told with only two characters — the father and the prodigal — gains sufficiently in emphasis by the introduction of a third — the good son — to warrant this violation of economy. The greatest structural problem

of the writer of short-stories is to strike just the proper balance between the effort for economy of means — which tends to conciseness — and the effort for the utmost emphasis — which tends to amplitude of treatment.

There can be no doubt that the short-story, thus rigidly defined, exists as a distinct form of fiction, — a definite literary species obeying laws of its own. Now and again before the nineteenth century, it appeared unconsciously. Since Poe, it has grown conscious of itself, and has been deliberately developed to perfection by later masters, like Guy de Maupassant. But it must be admitted frankly that brief tales have always existed, and still continue to exist, which stand entirely outside the scope of this rigid and rather narrow definition. Professor Baldwin, after a careful examination of the hundred tales in Boccaccio's "Decameron," concluded that only two of them were short-stories in the modern critical sense,[1] and that only three others approached the totality of impression that depends on conscious unity of form. If we should select at random a hundred brief tales from the best contemporary magazines, we should find, of course, that a larger proportion of them would fulfil the definition; but it is almost certain that the majority of them would still be stories that merely happen to be short, instead of true short-stories in the modern critical sense. Yet these brief fictions, which are not short-stories, and for which we have no name, are none the less estimable in content, and sometimes present a wider view of life than could be encompassed within the rigid limits of a technical short-story. Hawthorne's tales stand higher in the history of literature than Poe's, because they reveal a deeper insight

[1] The second story of the second day, and the sixth story of the *ninth* day. See "American Short Stories," p. 28.

into life, even though the great New England dreamer often violates the principle of economy of means, and constructs less firmly than the mathematically-minded Poe. Washington Irving's brief tales, such as "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," which are not short-stories in the technical sense of the term, are far more valuable as representations of humanity than many a structural masterpiece of Guy de Maupassant. "For my part," Irving wrote to one of his friends, "I consider a story merely as a frame on which to stretch the materials; it is the play of thought, and sentiment, and language, the weaving in of characters, lightly yet expressively delineated; the familiar and faithful exhibition of scenes in common life; and the half-concealed vein of humor that is often playing through the whole, — these are among what I aim at, and upon which I felicitate myself in proportion as I think I succeed." There is much to be said in favor of this meandering and leisurely method; and authors too intent upon a merely technical accomplishment may lose the genial breadth of outlook upon life which men like Irving have so charmingly displayed. Let us admit, therefore, that the story-which-is-merely-short is just as worthy of cultivation as the technical short-story.

But if there exist many brief tales which are not short-stories, so also there exist certain short-stories which are not brief. Mr. Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw" is a short-story, in the technical sense of the term, although it contains between two and three hundred pages. Assuredly it is not a novelette. It aims to produce one narrative effect, and only one; and it is difficult to imagine how the full force of its cumulative mystery and terror could have been created with greater economy

of means. It is a long short-story. Stevenson's "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," which is conceived, and for the most part executed, as a short-story, is longer than the same author's "The Beach of Falesá," which is conceived and executed as a novelette. Dr. Edward Everett Hale's famous short-story, "The Man Without a Country," is long enough to be printed in a little volume by itself. The point to be remembered, therefore, is that the two different types of brief fiction are to be distinguished one from the other not by comparative length but by structural method. The critic may formulate the technical laws of the stricter type; but it must not be forgotten that these laws do not apply (and there is no reason whatever that they should) to those other estimable narratives which, though brief, stand outside the definition of the short-story.

Bearing in mind this limitation of the subject, we may proceed to a further study of the strict short-story type. In an admirable essay on "The Short Story,"[1] Professor Bliss Perry has discussed at length its requirements and restrictions. Admitting that writers of short-stories usually cast a marked preponderance of emphasis on one of the three elements of narrative, to the subversion of the other two, Professor Perry calls attention to the fact that in the short-story of character, "the characters must be unique, original enough to catch the eye at once." The writer does not have sufficient time at his disposal to reveal the full human significance of the commonplace. "If his theme is character-development, then that development must be hastened by striking experiences." Hence

[1] Published first in *The Atlantic Monthly* for August, 1902, and since included, as Chapter XII, in "A Study of Prose Fiction": Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1904.

this class of short-story, as compared with the novel, must set forth characters more unusual and unexpected. But in the short-story of action, on the other hand, the plot may be sufficient unto itself, and the characters may be the merest lay figures. The heroine of "The Lady or the Tiger," for example, is simply *a* woman — not any woman in particular; and the hero of "The Pit and the Pendulum" is simply *a* man — not any man in particular. The situation itself is sufficient to hold the reader's interest for the brief space of the story. Hence, although, in the short-story of character, the leading actor is likely to be strikingly individualized, the short-story of action may content itself with entirely colorless characters, devoid of any personal traits whatever. Professor Perry adds that in the class of short-story which casts the main emphasis on setting, "both characters and action may be almost without significance"; and he continues, — "If the author can discover to us a new corner of the world, or sketch the familiar scene to our heart's desire, or illumine one of the great human occupations, as war, or commerce, or industry, he has it in his power, through this means alone, to give us the fullest satisfaction."

From the fact that the short-story does not keep the powers of the reader long upon the stretch, Professor Perry deduces certain opportunities afforded to short-story writers but denied to novelists, — opportunities, namely, "for innocent didacticism, for posing problems without answering them, for stating arbitrary premises, for omitting unlovely details and, conversely, for making beauty out of the horrible, and finally for poetic symbolism." Passing on to a consideration of the demands which the short-story makes upon the writer, he asserts that, at its best, "it calls for visual imagination of a high

order: the power to see the object; to penetrate to its essential nature; to select the one characteristic trait by which it may be represented." Furthermore, it demands a mastery of style, "the verbal magic that recreates for us what the imagination has seen." But, on the other hand, "to write a short-story requires no sustained power of imagination"; "nor does the short-story demand of its author essential sanity, breadth, and tolerance of view." Since he deals only with fleeting phases of existence, — "not with wholes, but with fragments," — the writer of the short-story "need not be consistent; he need not think things through." Hence, in spite of the technical difficulties which beset the author of short-stories, his work is, on human grounds, more easy than that of the novelist, who must be sane and consistent, and must be able to sustain a prolonged effort of interpretive imagination.

These points have been so fully covered and so admirably illustrated by Professor Perry that they do not call for any further discussion in this place. But perhaps something may be added concerning the different equipments that are required by authors of novels and authors of short-stories. Matthew Arnold, in a well-known sonnet, spoke of Sophocles as a man "who saw life steadily and saw it whole"; and if we judge the novelist and the writer of short-stories by their attitudes toward life, we may say that they divide this verse between them. Balzac, George Eliot, and Mr. Meredith look at life in the large; they try to "see it whole" and to reproduce the chaos of its intricate relations: but Poe, de Maupassant, and Mr. Kipling aim rather to "see steadily" a limited phase of life, to focus their minds upon a single point of experience, and then to depict this point briefly and strikingly. It follows that the novelist requires an experience of life

far more extensive than that which is required by the writer of short-stories. The great novelists have all been men of mature years and accumulated wisdom. But if an author knows one little point of life profoundly, he may fashion a great short-story, even though that one thing be the only thing he knows. Of life as it is actually lived, of genuine humanity of character, of moral responsibility in human intercourse, Edgar Allan Poe knew nothing; and yet he was fully equipped to produce what remain until this day the most perfect examples of the short-story in our language. It is therefore not surprising that although the great novels of the world have been written for the most part by men over forty years of age, the great short-stories have been written by men in their twenties and their thirties. Mr. Kipling wrote two or three short-stories which are almost great when he was only seventeen. Steadiness of vision is a quality of mind quite distinct from the ability to see things whole. "Plain Tales from the Hills" are in many ways the better stories for being the work of a lad of twenty: whatever Mr. Kipling saw at that very early age he envisaged steadily and expressed with the glorious triumphant strength of youth. But if at the same period he had attempted a novel, the world undoubtedly would have found out how very young he was. He would have been incapable of slicing a cross-section clean through the vastitude of human life, of seeing it whole, and of representing the appalling intricacy of its interrelations. On the other hand, most of the mature men who have been wise enough to do the latter, have shown themselves incapable of focusing their minds steadily upon a single point of experience. Wholeness and steadiness of vision — few are the men who, like Sophocles, have possessed them both. The

same author, therefore, has almost never been able to write great short-stories and great novels. Scott wrote only one short-story, — "Wandering Willie's Tale" in "Redgauntlet"; Dickens also wrote only one that is worthy of being considered a masterpiece of art, — "A Child's Dream of a Star"; and Thackeray, Cooper, George Eliot, and Mr. Meredith have written none at all. On the other hand, Poe could not possibly have written a novel; Guy de Maupassant shows himself less masterly in his more extended works; and Mr. Kipling has yet to prove that the novel is within his powers. Hawthorne is the one most notable example of the man who, beginning as a writer of short-stories, has developed in maturer years a mastery of the novel.

Unlike the short-story, the novel aims to produce a series of effects, — a cumulative combination of the elements of narrative, — and acknowledges no restriction to economy of means. It follows that the novel, as a literary form, requires far less attention than the short-story to minute details of art. Great novels may be written by authors as careless as Scott, as lazy as Thackeray, or as cumbersome as George Eliot; for if a novelist gives us a criticism of life which is new and true, we forgive him if he fails in the nicer points of structure and style. But without these nicer points, the short-story is impossible. The economy of means that it demands can be conserved only by rigid restriction of structure; and the necessary emphasis can be produced only by perfection of style. The great masters of the short-story, like Poe and Hawthorne, Daudet and de Maupassant, have all been careful artists: they have not, like Thackeray, been slovenly in structure; they have not, like Scott, been regardless of style. The artistic instinct shows itself

almost always at a very early age. If a man is destined to be an artist, he usually exhibits a surprising precocity of expression at a period when as yet he has very little to express. This is another reason why the short-story, as opposed to the novel, belongs to youth rather than to age. Though a young writer may be obliged to acknowledge inferiority to his elders in maturity of message, he may not infrequently transcend them in fineness of technical accomplishment.

Another point that remains to be considered, before we relinquish this general discussion in order to devote our attention more particularly to a technical study of the structure of the short-story, is that, although the novel may be either realistic or romantic in general method, the short-story is almost of necessity obliged to be romantic. In the brief space allotted to him, it is practically impossible for the writer of short-stories to induce a general truth from particular imagined facts imitated from actuality: it is far simpler to deduce the imagined details of the story from a central thesis, held securely in the author's mind and suggested to the reader at the outset. It is a quicker process to think from the truth to facts than to think from facts to the truth. Daudet and de Maupassant, who worked realistically in their novels, worked romantically in their *contes;* and the great short-stories of our own language have nearly all been written by romantic authors, like Poe, Hawthorne, Stevenson, and Mr. Kipling.

CHAPTER XI

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SHORT-STORY

SINCE the aim of a short-story is to produce a single narrative effect with the greatest economy of means that is consistent with the utmost emphasis, it follows that, given any single narrative effect, — any theme, in other words, for a short-story — there can be only one best way to construct the story based upon it. A novel may be built in any of a multitude of ways; and the selection of method depends more upon the temperament and taste of the author than upon inherent logical necessity. But in a short-story the problem of the author is primarily structural; and structure is a matter of intellect instead of a matter of temperament and taste. Now, the intellect differs from the taste in being an absolute and general, rather than an individual and personal, quality of mind. There is no disputing matters of taste, as the Latin proverb justly says; but matters of intellect may be disputed logically until a definite decision is arrived at. Hence, although the planning of a novel must be left to the individual author, the structure of a short-story may be considered as a matter impersonal and absolute, like the working out of a geometrical proposition.

The initial problem of the writer of short-stories is to find out by intellectual means the one best way of constructing the story that he has to tell; and, in order to solve this problem, there are many questions he must take up and decide. First of all, he must conserve the need

for economy of means by considering how many, or rather, *how few*, characters are necessary to the narrative, how few distinct events he can get along with, and how narrow is the compass of time and place within which he may compact his material. He must next consider all the available points of view from which to tell the given story, and must decide which of them will best subserve his purpose. Next, in deciding on his means of delineating characters, of representing action, of employing setting, he must be guided always by the endeavor to strike a just balance between (on the one hand) the greatest economy of means and (on the other) the utmost emphasis. And finally, to conserve the latter need, he must, in planning the narrative step by step, be guided by the principle of emphasis in all its phases.

The natural emphasis of the initial and the terminal position is, in the short-story, a matter of prime importance. The opening of a perfectly constructed tale fulfils two purposes, one of which is intellectual and the other emotional. Intellectually, it indicates clearly to the reader whether, in the narrative that follows, the element of action, or of character, or of setting is to be predominant, — in other words, which of the three sorts of narrative effect the story is intended to produce. Emotionally, it strikes the key-note and suggests the tone of the entire story. Edgar Allan Poe, in his greatest tales, planned his openings infallibly to fulfil these purposes. He began a story of setting with description; a story of character with a remark made by, or made about, the leading actor; and a story of action with a sentence pregnant with potential incident. Furthermore, he conveyed in his very first sentence a subtle sense of the emotional tone of the entire narrative.

In opening his short-stories, Hawthorne showed himself far inferior to his great contemporary. Only unawares did he occasionally hit upon the inevitable first sentence. Often he wasted time at the beginning by writing an unnecessary introduction; and frequently he began upon the wrong track, by suggesting character at the outset of a story of action, or suggesting setting at the outset of a story of character. The tale of "The Gentle Boy," for instance, which was one of the first to attract attention to his genius, begins unnecessarily with an historical essay of three pages; and it is not until the narrative is well on its way that the reader is able to sense the one thing that it is all about.

Mr. Rudyard Kipling, in his earlier stories, employed a method of opening which is worthy of careful critical consideration. In "Plain Tales from the Hills" and the several volumes that followed it within the next few years, his habit was to begin with an expository essay, filling the space of a paragraph or two, in which he stated the theme of the story he was about to tell. "This is what the story is to deal with," he would say succinctly: "Now listen to the tale itself." This method is extremely advantageous on the score of economy. It gives the reader at the outset an intellectual possession of the theme; and knowing from the very beginning the effect designed to be produced, he can follow with the greater economy of attention the narrative that produces it. But, on the other hand, the method is inartistic, in that it presents explicitly what might with greater subtlety be conveyed implicitly, and subverts the mood of narrative by obtruding exposition. In his later stories, Mr. Kipling has discarded for the most part this convenient but too obvious expedient, and has revealed his theme implicitly through the narra-

tive tenor and emotional tone of his initial sentences. That the latter method of opening is the more artistic will be seen at once from a comparison of examples. This is the beginning of "Thrown Away," an early story:—

"To rear a boy under what parents call the 'sheltered life system' is, if the boy must go into the world and fend for himself, not wise. Unless he be one in a thousand he has certainly to pass through many unnecessary troubles; and may, possibly, come to extreme grief simply from ignorance of the proper proportions of things.

"Let a puppy eat the soap in the bath-room or chew a newly blacked boot. He chews and chuckles until, by and by, he finds out that blacking and Old Brown Windsor made him very sick; so he argues that soap and boots are not wholesome. Any old dog about the house will soon show him the unwisdom of biting big dogs' ears. Being young, he remembers and goes abroad, at six months, a well-mannered little beast with a chastened appetite. If he had been kept away from boots, and soap, and big dogs till he came to the trinity full-grown and with developed teeth, consider how fearfully sick and thrashed he would be! Apply that notion to the 'sheltered life,' and see how it works. It does not sound pretty, but it is the better of two evils.

"There was a Boy once who had been brought up under the 'sheltered life' theory; and the theory killed him dead. . . ."

And so on. At this point, after the expository introduction, the narrative proper begins. Consider now the opening of a later story, "Without Benefit of Clergy." This is the first sentence: — "But if it be a girl?" Notice how much has already been said and suggested in this

little question of six words. Surely the beginning of this story is conducted with the better art.

But, in the structure of the short-story, the emphasis of the terminal position is an even more important matter. In this regard again Poe shows his artistry, in stopping at the very moment when he has attained completely his pre-established design. His conclusions remain to this day unsurpassed in the sense they give of absolute finality. Hawthorne was far less firm in mastering the endings of his stories. His personal predilection for pointing a moral to adorn his tale led him frequently to append a passage of homiletic comment which was not bone of the bone and blood of the blood of the narrative itself. In the chapter on emphasis, we have already called attention to Guy de Maupassant's device of periodic structure, by means of which the solution of the story is withheld till the concluding sentences. This exceedingly effective expedient, however, is applicable only in the sort of story wherein the element of surprise is inherent in the nature of the theme. In no other single feature of construction may the work of the inexperienced author be so readily detected as in the final passage of his story. Mr. Kipling's "Lispeth" (the first of "Plain Tales from the Hills"), which was written at a very early age, began perfectly [the first word is "She"] and proceeded well; but when he approached his conclusion, the young author did not know where to stop. His story really ended at the words, "And she never came back"; for at that point his pre-established design had been entirely effected. But instead of closing there, he appended four unnecessary paragraphs, dealing with the subsequent life of his heroine, — all of which was, to use his own familiar phrase, "another story." Poe and de Maupassant would not have made

this mistake; and neither would Mr. Kipling after he had grown into mastery of artistic method.

In his very interesting paper on "The Philosophy of Composition," Edgar Allan Poe outlined step by step the intellectual processes by which he developed the structure of "The Raven," and fashioned a finished poem from a preconceived effect. It is greatly to be regretted that he did not write a similar essay outlining in detail the successive stages in the structure of one of his short-stories. With his extraordinarily clear and analytic intellect, he fashioned his plots with mathematical precision. So rigorously did he work that in his best stories we feel that the removal of a sentence would be an amputation. He succeeded absolutely in giving his narrative the utmost emphasis with the greatest economy of means.

If we learn through and through how a single perfect story is constructed, we shall have gone far toward understanding the technic of story-building as a whole. Let us therefore analyze one of Poe's short-stories, — following in the main the method which he himself pursued in his analysis of "The Raven," — in order to learn the successive steps by which any excellent short-story may be developed from its theme. Let us choose "Ligeia" for the subject of this study, because it is very widely known, and because Poe himself considered it the greatest of his tales. Let us see how, starting with the theme of the story, Poe developed step by step the structure of his finished fabric; and how, granted his pre-established design, the progress of his plan was in every step inevitable.[1]

[1] The analysis of "Ligeia" which follows was printed in the *Reader* for February, 1906. It is here resumed with a few revisions of detail.

The theme of "Ligeia" was evidently suggested by those lines from Joseph Glanvill which, quoted as a motto for the story, are thrice repeated during the course of the narrative: —

"And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will, pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will."

Poe recognized, with the English moralist, that the human will is strong and can conquer many of the ills that flesh is heir to. If it were still stronger, it could do more mighty things; and if it were *very much* stronger, it is even conceivable that it might vanquish death, its last and sternest foe. Now it was legitimate for the purposes of fiction to imagine a character endowed with a will strong enough to conquer death; and a striking narrative effect could certainly be produced by setting forth this moral conquest. This, then, became the purpose of the story: to exhibit a character with a superhuman will, and to show how, by sheer force of volition, this person conquered death.

Having thus decided on his theme, the writer of the story was first forced to consider how many, or rather, *how few*, characters were necessary to the narrative. One, at least, was obviously essential, — the person with the superhuman will. For esthetic reasons Poe made this character a woman, and called her Ligeia; but it is evident that *structurally* the story would have been the same if he had made the character a man. The resultant narrative would have been different in mood and tone; but it would not have been different in structure. Given this

central character, it was not perhaps evident at first that another person was needed for the tale. But in all stories which set forth an extraordinary being, it is necessary to introduce an ordinary character to serve as a standard by which the unusual capabilities of the central figure may be measured. Furthermore, in stories which treat of the miraculous, it is necessary to have at least one eye-witness to the extraordinary circumstances beside the person primarily concerned in them. Hence another character was absolutely needed in the tale. This second person, moreover, had to be intimately associated with the heroine, for the two reasons already considered. The most intimate relation imaginable was that of husband and wife; he must therefore be the husband of Ligeia. Beside these two people, — a woman of superhuman will, and her husband, a man of ordinary powers, — no other character was necessary; and therefore Poe did not (and *could not*, according to the laws of the short-story) introduce another. The Lady of Tremaine, as we shall see later on, is not, technically considered, a character.

The main outline of the story could now be plotted. Ligeia and her husband must be exhibited to the reader; and then, in her husband's presence, Ligeia must conquer death by the vigor of her will. But in order to do this, she must first die. If she merely exerted her will to ward off the attacks of death, the reader would not be convinced that her recovery had been accomplished by other than ordinary means. She must die, therefore, and must afterwards resurrect herself by a powerful exertion of volition. The reader must be fully convinced that she did really die; and therefore, before her resurrection, she must be laid for some time in the grave. The story, then, divided itself into two parts: the first, in which

Ligeia was alive, terminated with her death; and the second, in which she was dead, ended with her resurrection.

Having thus arrived at the main outline of his plot, Poe was next forced to decide on the point of view from which the story should be told. Under the existing conditions, any one of three distinct points of view may have seemed, at the first glance, available: that of the chief character, that of the secondary character, and that of an external omniscient personality. But only a little consideration was necessary to show that only one of these three could successfully be employed. Obviously, the story could not be narrated by Ligeia: for it would be awkward to let an extraordinary woman discourse about her own unusual qualities; and furthermore, she could hardly narrate a story involving as one of its chief features her stay among the dead without being expected to tell the secrets of her prison-house. It was likewise impossible to tell the tale from the point of view of an external omniscient personality. In order that the final and miraculous incident might seem convincing, it had to be narrated not impersonally but personally, not externally but by an eye-witness. Therefore, the story must, of course, be told by the husband of Ligeia.

At this point the main outline was completed. It then became necessary for Poe to plan the two divisions of the story in detail. In the first part, no action was necessary, and very little attention had to be paid to setting. It was essential that all of the writer's stress should be laid on the element of character; for the sole purpose of this initial division of the story must be to produce upon the reader an extremely emphatic impression of the extraordinary personality of Ligeia. As soon as the reader

could be sufficiently impressed with the force of her character, she must be made to die; and the first part of the story would be finished. But at this point Poe was obliged to choose between the direct and the indirect means of delineating character. Should Ligeia be depicted directly by her husband, or indirectly, through her own speech? In other words, should this first half of the story be a description or a conversation? The matter was easy to decide. The method of conversation was unavailable; because a dialogue between Ligeia and her husband would keep the attention of the reader hovering from one to the other, whereas it was necesary for the purpose of the tale to focus all of the attention on Ligeia. She must, therefore, be depicted directly by her husband. Having concluded that he must devote the entire first half of his story to this description, Poe employed all his powers to make it adequate and emphatic. The description must, of course, be largely subjective and suggestive, and must be pervaded with a sense of something unfathomable about the person described. In order that (reverting to the language of Poe's own critical dictum) "his very initial sentence" might "tend to the outbringing of this effect," the author wrote, "I cannot for my soul remember how, when, or even precisely where I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia": and the story was begun.

It was more difficult to handle the second division of the tale, which was to deal with the period between Ligeia's death and her resurrection. The main stress of the story now ceased to be laid on the element of character. The element of action, furthermore, was subsidiary in the second part of the tale, as it had been already in the first. All that had to happen was the resurrection of

Ligeia; and this the reader had been forced by the very theme of the story to foresee. The chief interest in the second part must therefore lie in determining where and when and how this resurrection was accomplished. A worthy setting must be found for the culminating event. Poe could lose no time in preparing a place for his climax; and therefore he was obliged, as soon as he had laid Ligeia in the grave, to begin an elaborate description of the stage settings of his final scene. The place must be wild and weird and arabesque. It must be worthy to receive a resurrected mortal revisiting the glimpses of the moon. The place was found, the time — midnight — decided upon: but the question remained, — *how* should Ligeia be resurrected?

And here arose almost an insuperable difficulty. Ligeia had been buried (*must have been* buried, as we have seen), and her body had been given to the worms. Yet now she must be revived. And it would not be sufficient to let her merely walk bodily into the fantastic apartment where her husband, dream-haunted, was waiting to receive her; for the point to be emphasized was not so much the mere fact of her being once more alive, as the fact that she had won her way back to life by the exertion of her own extraordinary will. The reader must be shown not only *the result* of her triumph over death, but *the very process of the struggle* through which by sheer volition she forced her soul back into the bodily life. If only her body were present, so that the reader could be shown its gradual obsession by her soul, all would be easily accomplished; but, by the conditions of the story, her body *could not* be present: and the difficulty of the problem was extreme.

But here Poe hit upon a solution of the difficulty. Would not another dead body do as well? Surely Ligeia

could breathe her life into any discarded female form. Therefore, of course, her husband must marry again, solely in order that his second wife should die. The Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine is, therefore, as I have already hinted, not really a character, but only a necessary adjunct to the final scene, an indispensable piece of stage property. In order to indicate this fact, Poe was obliged to abstain carefully from describing her in detail, and to seek in every possible way to prevent the reader's attention from dwelling long upon her. Hence, although, in writing the first part of the story, he devoted several pages to the description of the heroine, he dismissed the Lady Rowena, in the second part, with only two descriptive epithets, — "fair-haired and blue-eyed," to distinguish her briefly from the dark-eyed and raven-haired Ligeia.

With the help of this convenient body, it was easy for Poe to develop his final scene. The intense struggle of Ligeia's soul to win its way back to the world could be worked up with enthralling suspense: and when at last the climax was reached and the husband realized that his lost love stood living before him, the purpose of the story would be accomplished, Ligeia's will would have done its work, and there would be nothing more to tell. Poe wrote, "These are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes — of my lost love — of the Lady — of the LADY LIGEIA": and the story was ended.

For it must be absolutely understood that with whatever may have happened after that moment of entire recognition this particular story does not, and cannot, concern itslf. Whether in the next moment Ligeia dies again irrevocably, or whether she lives an ordinary lifetime and then ultimately dies forever, or whether she

remains alive eternally as a result of the triumph of her will, are questions entirely beyond the scope of the story and have nothing to do with the single narrative effect which Poe, from the very outset, was planning to produce. At no other point does he more clearly display his mastery than in his choice of the perfect moment at which to end his story.

It would, of course, be idle to assert that Poe disposed of all the narrative problems which confronted him while constructing this story precisely in the order I have indicated. Unfortunately, he never explained in print the genesis of any of his stories, and we can only imagine the process of his plans with the aid of his careful analysis of the development of "The Raven." But I think it has been clearly shown that the structure of "Ligeia" is at all points inevitably conditioned by its theme, and that no detail of the structure could be altered without injuring the effect of the story; and I am confident that some intellectual process similar to that which has been outlined must be followed by every author who seeks to construct stories as perfect in form as Poe's.

The student of short-story structure is therefore advised to submit several other masterpieces of the form to a process of intellectual analysis similar to that which we have just pursued. By so doing he will become impressed with the *inevitability* of every structural expedient that is employed in the best examples of the type. For a further illustration of this inevitability of structure, let us look for a moment at the parable of "The Prodigal Son" (Luke xv., beginning with the eleventh verse), which, although it was written down many centuries ago, fulfils the modern critical concept of the short-story, in that it produces a single narrative effect with the greatest economy

of means that is consistent with the utmost emphasis. For the purposes of this study, let us set aside the religious implications of the parable, and consider it as an ordinary work of fiction. The story should more properly be called "The Forgiving Father," rather than "The Prodigal Son"; because the single narrative effect to be wrought out is the extent of a father's forgiveness toward his erring children. Two characters are obviously needed for the tale, — first a father to exercise forgiveness, and second, a child to be forgiven. Whether this child were a son or a daughter would, of course, have no effect on the mere structure of the story. In the narrative as we know it, the erring child is a son. In pursuance of the greatest economy of means, the story might be told with these two characters only, because the effect to be wrought out is based on the personal relation between them, — a relation involving no one else. But fatherly forbearance exercised toward an *only* child might seem a trait of human weakness instead of patriarchal strength; and the father's forgiveness will be greatly accentuated if, beside the prodigal, he has other children less liable to error. Therefore, in pursuance of the utmost emphasis, it is necessary to add a third character, — another son who is not allured into the way of the transgressor. The story must necessarily be narrated by an external omniscient personality: it must be seen and told from a point of view aloof and god-like. The father could not tell it, because the theme of the tale is the beauty of his own character; and neither of the two sons is in a position to see the story whole and to narrate it without prejudice. The story opens perfectly, with the very simple sentence, "A certain man had two sons." Already the reader knows that he is to be told a story of character (rather than of action or of setting) concerning

three people, the most important of whom is the certain man who has been mentioned first. Consider, in passing, how faulty would have been such another opening as this, for instance, — "Not long ago, in a city of Judea" . . . Such an initial sentence would have suggested setting, instead of suggesting character, as the leading element in the story. Very properly, the first of the two sons to be singled out specifically is the more important of the two, the prodigal: "And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.'" Thus in only two sentences the reader is given the entire basis of the story. The swift and simple narrative that follows is masterly in absolute conciseness. The younger son takes his journey into a far country, wastes his substance in riotous living, begins to be in want, suffers and repents, and returns to seek the forgiveness of his father. Wonderfully, beautifully, his father loves and pities and forgives him: "For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." At this point the story would end, if it were told with only two characters instead of three. But emphasis demands that the elder son should now make an entirely reasonable objection to the reception of the prodigal; because the great love which is the essence of the father's character will shine forth much more brightly when he overrules the objection. He does so in the same words he had used in the first moment of emotion: "For this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." These beautiful words, which now receive the emphasis of iteration as well as the emphasis of terminal position, sum up and complete the entire pre-established design.

This story, which contains only five hundred words, is a little masterpiece of structure. It embodies a narra-

tive theme of profound human import; it exhibits three characters so clearly and completely drawn that the reader knows them better than he knows many a hero of a lengthy novel; and it displays an absolute adjustment between economy and emphasis in its succinct yet touching train of incidents. Furthermore, it is also, in the English version of the King James translators, a little masterpiece of style. The words are simple, homely, and direct. Most of them are of Saxon origin, and the majority are monosyllabic. Less than half a dozen words in the entire narrative contain more than two syllables. And yet they are set so delicately together that they fall into rhythms potent with emotional effect. How much the story gains from this mastery of prose may be felt at once by comparing with the King James version parallel passages from the standard French Bible. The English monosyllabic refrain, with its touching balance of rhythm, loses nearly all of its esthetic effect in the French translation: "*Car mon fils, que voici, était mort, mais il est ressuscité; il était perdu, mais il est retrouvé.*" And that very moving sentence about the elder son, "And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out and entreated him," becomes in the French Bible, "*Mais il se mit en colère, et ne voulut point entrer; et son père étant sorti, le priait d'entrer.*" No especial nicety of ear is necessary to notice that the first is greatly written, and the second is not.

And this leads us to the general consideration that even a perfectly constructed story will fail of the uttermost effect unless it be at all points adequately written. After Poe had, with his intellect, outlined step by step the structure of "Ligeia," he was obliged to confront a further problem, — a problem this time more emotional than

intellectual — the problem of writing the story with the thrilling and enthralling harmony of that low, musical language which haunts us like the echo of a dream. It is one thing to build a story; it is quite another thing to write it: and in Poe's case it is evident that an appreciable interval of time must have elapsed between his accomplishment of the first, and his undertaking of the second, effort. He built his stories intellectually, in cold blood; he wrote them emotionally, in esthetic exaltation: and the two moods are so distinct and mutually exclusive that they must have been successive instead of coexistent. Some authors build better than they write; others write better than they build. Seldom, very seldom, is a man equipped, as Poe was, with an equal mastery of structure and of style. Yet though unity of form may be attained through structure alone, unity of mood is dependent mainly upon style. The language should be pitched throughout in tune with the emotional significance of the narrative effect to be produced. Any sentence which is tuned out of harmony will jangle and disrupt the unity of mood, which is as necessary to a great short-story as it is to a great lyric poem. Hawthorne, though his structure was frequently at fault, proved the greatness of his art by maintaining, through sheer mastery of style, an absolute unity of mood in every story that he undertook. Mr. Kipling has not always done so, because he has frequently used language more with manner than with style; but in his best stories, like "The Brushwood Boy" and "They," there is a unity of tone throughout the writing that sets them on the plane of highest art.

CHAPTER XII

THE FACTOR OF STYLE

THE element of style, which has just been touched upon in reference to the short-story, must now be considered in its broader aspect as a factor of fiction in general. Hitherto, in examining the methods of fiction, we have confined our attention for the most part to the study of structural expedients. The reason is that structure, being a matter merely of the intellect, can be analyzed clearly and expounded definitely. Like any other intellectual subject — geometry, for instance — structure may be taught. But style, although it is in fiction a factor scarcely less important, is not a matter merely of the intellect. It is not so easily permissible of clear analysis and definite exposition; and although it is true that, in a certain sense, it may be learned, it is also true that it cannot be taught.

The word "style" comes trippingly to the tongue of every critic; but it has never yet been satisfactorily defined. Famous phrases have been made about it, to be sure; but most of these, like that corrupted from Buffon's cursory remark in his discourse of reception into the Academy — "*Le style est de l'homme même*," — are lofty admissions of the impossibility of definition. By this fact we are fortified in our opinion that style is a matter of feeling rather than of intellect. Avoiding, therefore, as unwise any attempt at definition, we may yet succeed in clarifying our ideas regarding style if we circle round the subject.

At the outset, in order to narrow the compass of the circle, let us admit that the familiar phrase "bad style" is a contradiction of terms. Basically, there is no such thing as good style or bad. Either a literary utterance is made with style, or else it is made without it. This initial distinction is absolute, not relative. It must, however, be admitted that of two utterances made with style, the one may be more imbued with that quality than is the other; but even this secondary distinction is a matter of more and less, rather than of better and worse. Style, then, is a quality possessed in a greater or less degree, or else not possessed at all. This much being granted, we may investigate with clearer minds the philosophic aspect of the subject.

Language makes to the mind of the reader or the listener an appeal which is twofold. First, it conveys to his intellect a definite meaning through the content of the words that are employed; and secondly, it conveys to his sensibilities an indefinite suggestion through their sound. Consciously, he receives a meaning from the denotation of the words; subconsciously, he receives a suggestion from their connotation. Now, an utterance has the quality of style when these two appeals of language — the denotative and the connotative, the definite and the indefinite, the intellectual and the sensuous — are so co-ordinated as to produce upon the reader or the listener an effect which is, not dual, but indissolubly single. And an utterance is devoid of the quality of style when, although it conveys a meaning to the intellect through the content of the words, it does not reinforce that conveyance of meaning by a cognate and harmonic appeal to the senses through their sound. In the latter case the language produces upon the recipient an effect which is, not single, but dual and divorced.

The matter may be made more clear by the examination of concrete examples. The following sentence, for instance, is devoid of style: "The square on the hypothenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides": for, although by its content it conveys to the intellect a meaning which is entirely clear and absolutely definite, it does not by its sound convey to the senses a suggestion which is cognate. But, on the other hand, the following lines from Tennyson's "The Princess" are rich in style, because the appeals to the intellect and to the ear are so co-ordinated as to produce a single simultaneous effect: —

> "Myriads of rivulets hurrying thro' the lawn,
> The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
> And murmuring of innumerable bees."

In these lines, fully as much is conveyed to the reader by the mere melody of m's and r's and l's as by the content, or denotation, of the words. For instance, the word "innumerable," which denotes to the intellect merely "incapable of being numbered," is in this connection made to suggest to the senses the murmuring of bees. That one word, therefore, accomplishes a dual service, and contributes to the expression of the general idea in one way through its content and in another through its sound.

This co-ordination of the two appeals is the origin and the essence of the quality of style. But the question now demands to be considered, — *how* may this co-ordination be effected? The first detail we must attend to is the choice of words. Tennyson's task, in the lines that we have just considered, was comparatively easy. He was writing about certain sounds; and it was not especially

difficult for him to imitate those sounds with the words that he selected to denote them. His device was the obvious one which is called, by rhetoricians, onomatopœia. In every language those words which are denotative of sounds are nearly always also imitative of them. Such words, as, for example, "whisper," "thunder," "rattle," are in themselves stylistic. Alone, and apart from any context, they incorporate that cognate appeal of significance and sound which is the secret of style. Thus far the matter is extremely simple. But there are also many words which denote other things than sounds and yet somehow convey subtly to the ear a sensuous suggestion of their content. Such words, for instance, are "mud," "nevermore," and "tremulous." Any child could tell you that words like these "sound just like what they mean"; and yet it would be impossible for the critical intellect to explain exactly wherein lies the fitness between sound and sense in such a word as "mud." The fitness, however, is obviously there. If we select from several languages words which are identical in denotation, we are likely to find that, because of their difference in sound, they connote different phases of the idea which they contain. For example, the English word "death" has a spiritual sound; whereas the German "*der Tod*" sounds terrible and grim, and the French "*la mort*" sounds horrid and bizarre. In content, these three words are indistinguishable; but in style they differ very widely. Their diversity of connotation is obviously inherent in their sound; and yet, though the difference may be heard at once, it seems inexplicable by the intellect.

But by far the greatest number of stylistic words owe their connotation not so much to their sound alone, as to their capacity for evoking memories. They awake the

psychologic process of association. Such are the words which lie close to the heart of every one's experience, — words like "home," "sorrow," "mother," "youth," and "friends." Whenever such a word is used, it conveys to the reader or the listener not only the specific meaning intended by the momentary context, but also a subsidiary and subconscious recollection of many phases of his personal experience. All of the indisputably magic words possess this associative or *memorable* quality. Saying one thing definitely, they evoke a concordant harmony of subconscious and shadowy suggestion. Expressing a message in the present, they recall remembered beauty from the past. Thus it is with the words of those two enchanted lines of Keats, —

> "Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

They say much more than what they say. Conveying one meaning to the reader, they remind him of many, many others.

But the choice of suggestive and memorable words is only the first step toward mastery of style. The perfect marriage of significance and sound is dependent not so much upon the words themselves as upon the way in which they are arranged. The art of style, like every other art, proceeds by an initial selection of materials and a subsequent arrangement of them in accordance with a pattern. In style, the pattern is of prime importance; and therefore, in order to understand the witchery of writing, we must next consider technically the patterning of words.

This phase of the subject has been clearly expounded and deftly illustrated by Robert Louis Stevenson in his

essay "On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature."[1] This essay is, so far as I know, the only existing treatise on the technic of style which is of any practical value to the incipient artist. It should therefore be read many times and mastered thoroughly by every student of the mystery of writing. Since it is now easily accessible, it will not be necessary here to do more than summarize its leading points, — stating them in a slightly different way in order that they may better fit the present context.

Every normal sentence, unless it be extremely brief, contains a knot, or hitch. Up to a certain point, the thought is progressively complicated; after that, it is resolved. Now, the art of style demands that this natural implication and explication of the thought should be attended by a cognate implication and explication of the movement of the sentence. Unless the hitch in the rhythm coincides with the hitch in the thought, the two appeals of the sentence (to the intellect and to the ear) will contest against each other instead of combining to accomplish a common effect. Therefore the first necessity in weaving a web of words is to conquer an accordance between the intellectual progression of the thought and the sensuous progression of the sound. The appeal of rhythm to the human ear is basic and elemental; and style depends for its effect more upon a mastery of rhythmic phrase than upon any other individual detail. In verse, the technical problem is twofold: first, to suggest to the ear of the reader a rhythmic pattern of standard regularity; and then, to vary from the regularity suggested, as deftly and as frequently as may be possible without ever allowing the reader for a moment

[1] First published in the *Contemporary Review* for April, 1885; and now included in Volume XXII of the "Thistle Edition": Charles Scribner's Sons.

to forget the fundamental pattern. In prose, the writer works with greater freedom; and his problem is therefore at once more easy and more difficult. Instead of starting with a standard pattern, he has to invent a web of rhythm which is suited to the sense he wishes to convey; and then, without ever disappointing the ear of the reader by unnecessarily withholding an expected fall of rhythm, he must shatter every inkling of monotony by continual and tasteful variation.

But language, by its very nature, offers to the ear not only a pattern of rhythm but also a pattern of letters. A mastery of literation is therefore a necessary element of style. Effects indisputably potent in suggestion may be gained by running a recurrence of certain letters, deftly for a time withheld, — since blatancy must always be avoided, — and yet triumphant in harmonious return. The great sentences of literature which echo in our ears because their sound is married to their meaning will be found upon examination to incorporate an intricate pattern of tastefully selected letters. Thus it is with the following sentence of Sir Thomas Browne's, wherein it is difficult to decide whether the rhythm or the literation contributes the larger share to its symmetry of sound: — "But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity." Thus it is, again, with this sentence from Ruskin's "Seven Lamps of Architecture": — "They are but the rests and monotones of the art; it is to its far happier, far higher, exaltation that we owe those fair fronts of variegated mosaic, charged with wild fancies and dark hosts of imagery, thicker and quainter than ever filled the depths of midsummer dream; those vaulted gates, trellised with close leaves; those window-labyrinths

of twisted tracery and starry light; those misty masses of multitudinous pinnacle and diademed tower; the only witnesses, perhaps, that remain to us of the faith and fear of nations." So it is also with these sentences from De Quincey's "The English Mail-Coach": — "The sea, the atmosphere, the light, bore each an orchestral part in this universal lull. Moonlight, and the first timid tremblings of the dawn, were by this time blending; and the blendings were brought into a still more exquisite state of unity by a slight silvery mist, motionless and dreamy, that covered the woods and fields, but with a veil of equable transparency."

A more detailed study of style along these lines would lead us to considerations too minutely technical for the purpose of the present volume. Style, in its highest development, belongs only to the finest art of literature; and it must be admitted that literature is not always, nor even perhaps most frequently, a fine art. Of the four rhetorical moods, or methods, of discourse, exposition lends itself the least to the assistance of the quality of style. Explanations are communicated from intellect to intellect. Words, in exposition, must be chosen chiefly with a view to definite denotation. The expository writer must be clear at any cost; he must aim to be precise rather than to be suggestive. Style is considerably more important as an adjunct to argumentation; since in order really to persuade, a writer must not only convince the reader's intellect but also rouse and conquer his emotions. But it is in narrative and in description that the quality of style is most contributive to the maximum effect. To evoke a picture in the reader's mind, or to convey to his consciousness a sense of movement, it is advisable (I am tempted to say necessary) to play upon his sensibilities

with the sound of the very sentences that are framed to convey a content to his intellect.

Since narrative is the natural mood of fiction, and since description is more often introduced than either argument or exposition, it follows that the writer of fiction must always reckon with the factor of style. It is true that stories may be written without style; it is even true that many of the greatest stories have been devoid of this indefinable quality: but it is not therefore logical to argue that the factor of style may be neglected. How much it may be made to contribute to the attainment of the aim of fiction will be recognized instinctively upon examination of any wonderfully written passage. Let us consider, for example, the following paragraphs from "Markheim." After Markheim has killed the dealer, and gone up-stairs to ransack the belongings of the murdered man, he suffers an interval of quietude amid alarms. —

"With the tail of his eye he saw the door — even glanced at it from time to time directly, like a besieged commander pleased to verify the good estate of his defenses. But in truth he was at peace. The rain falling in the street sounded natural and pleasant. Presently, on the other side, the notes of a piano were wakened to the music of a hymn, and the voices of many children took up the air and words. How stately, how comfortable was the melody! How fresh the youthful voices! Markheim gave ear to it smilingly, as he sorted out the keys; and his mind was thronged with answerable ideas and images; church-going children and the pealing of the high organ; children afield, bathers by the brookside, ramblers on the brambly common, kite-fliers in the windy and cloud-navigated sky; and then, at another cadence of the hymn, back again to church, and the somnolence of summer

Sundays, and the high genteel voice of the parson (which he smiled a little to recall) and the painted Jacobean tombs, and the dim lettering of the Ten Commandments in the chancel.

"And as he sat thus, at once busy and absent, he was startled to his feet. A flash of ice, a flash of fire, a bursting gush of blood, went over him, and then he stood transfixed and thrilling. A step mounted the stair slowly and steadily, and presently a hand was laid upon the knob, and the lock clicked, and the door opened."

Anybody who has ears to hear will immediately appreciate how much the effect of this passage is enhanced by the masterly employment of every phase of style which we have hitherto discussed. If, instead of writing, "Presently the notes of a piano were wakened to the music of a hymn," Stevenson had written, "Soon a piano began to play a hymn," he would have suggested to the ear a jangle like the banging of tin pans, instead of the measured melody he had in mind. And let it be particularly noted that the phrase suggested for comparison is, *in intellectual content alone*, scarcely distinct from the original. How little is the difference in denotation, how great the difference in suggestion! The brief phrase, "Kite-fliers in the windy and cloud-navigated sky," seems to blow us bodily upward into the air: — here is mastery of rhythm. "The somnolence of summer Sundays," is whispery and murmurous with s's, m's and n's: — here (more obviously) is mastery of literation. In the second paragraph, notice how the rhythm suddenly hurries when Markheim is startled to his feet; and in the last sentence, consider the monotonous and measured slowness of the movement, ominous with pauses.

Every now and then a critic steps forward with the state-

ment that style in fiction is not a deliberate and conscious conquest, that the sound of sentences is accidental and may therefore not be marshaled to contribute to the sense, and that preoccupation with details of rhythm and of literation is an evidence of a finical and narrow mind. To such a statement no answer is necessary but the wholesome advice to re-read, aloud and carefully, several passages on a par with that from "Markheim" which we have just examined. Very evidently Stevenson knew intuitively what he was about when he planned his rhythmic patterns and his literate orchestral harmonies.

I say "intuitively"; because, as I admitted at the outset, style is, with the author, a matter of feeling rather than of intellect. But matters may be planned with sensibility as well as with intelligence. The writer with the gift of style forehears a web of rhythm into which he weaves such words as may be denotative of his thought; and all the while that he is striving to be definite and clear, he carries in his mind a subtle sense of the harmonic accompaniment of consonants, the melodious eloquence of vowels.

By what means a writer may attain to mastery of style is a question not to be answered by the intellect. Matters of sensibility are personal, and every man must solve them for himself. The author of "Markheim," as he tells us in his essay on "A College Magazine," taught himself to write by playing the sedulous ape to many masters; and this method may be recommended to aspirants with an imitative ear. But there can be no general rule; because, although in the process of pure reason all men rightly minded think alike, each man differs from every other in the process of emotion.

This is the reason why style, beside being (as we asserted

at the outset) an absolute quality, possessed or not possessed by any literary utterance, is also in every case a quality personal to the author who attains it. In this regard, Buffon was right in stating that style is a phase of the man himself. Any work that is accomplished by the intellect alone belongs to man in general rather than to one man in particular; but any work that is accomplished by the sensibilities incorporates those profounder qualities by virtue of which each man stands distinct from every other. By studying the structure of an author's work, we can estimate his intellect: by studying the style, we can estimate that subtler entity which is the man himself.

At the close of our study of the materials and methods of fiction, it is advisable that we should consider in general the relation between form and content, — the respective value of methods and materials. Primarily, there are two groups of worthy fiction, — that which is great mainly on account of its content, and that which is great mainly on account of its form. It would be unwise, of course, to overestimate the single and inherent value of either material or method. Some comparison, however, may be made between the merits of the one group and the other.

In the first place, it must be noted that, as far as the general reader is concerned, the appeal of any work of fiction depends far more upon its content than upon its form. The average reader knows little and cares less about the technical methods of the art. What he demands above all is interesting subject-matter. He seeks, in the popular phrase, "a good story"; he wishes to be told interesting things about interesting people; and he does not feel especially concerned about the question

whether or not these things are told him in an interesting way. The matter, rather than the manner, is the element that most allures him.

There are many reasons that tempt the critic to accept without reservation the general reader's view. For instance, many of the most important works of fiction have been inefficient in mere art. The "Don Quixote" of Cervantes is indubitably one of the very greatest novels in all literature, for the reason that it contains so vast a world. Yet it is very faulty both in structure and in style. The author seems to have built it little by little, as he went along; and he changed his plan so often during the process of construction that the resultant edifice, like the cathedral of St. Peter's, is architecturally incoherent. He showed so little regard for unity that he did not hesitate to halt his novel for half a hundred pages while he set before the reader the totally extraneous novelette of "The Curious Impertinent," which he happened to find lying idle in his desk. How little he was a master of mere style may be felt at once by comparing his plays with those of Calderon. Yet these technical considerations do not count against the value of his masterpiece. All of Spain is there resumed and uttered, all pains that the idealist in any age must suffer, all the pity and the glory of aspiration misapplied.

Scott has no style, and Thackeray has no structure; but these technical defects go down before their magnitude of message. Scott teaches us the glory and the greatness of being healthy, young, adventurous, and happy; and Thackeray, with tears in his eyes that humanize the sneer upon his lips, teaches us that the thing we call Society, with a capital S, is but a vanity of vanities. If we turn from the novel to the short-story, we shall notice that

certain themes are in themselves so interesting that the resultant story could not fail to be effective even were it badly told. It is perhaps unfair to take as an example Mr. F. J. Stimson's tale called "Mrs. Knollys," because his story is both correctly constructed and beautifully written; but merely in theme this tale is so effective that it could have endured a less accomplished handling. The story runs as follows:[1] — A girl and her husband, both of whom are very young, go to the Alps for their honeymoon. The husband, in crossing a glacier, falls into a crevasse. His body cannot immediately be recovered; but Mrs. Knollys learns from a scientist who is making a study of the movement of the ice that in forty-five years the body will be carried to the end of the glacier. Thereafter she regards her husband as absent but not lost, and lives her life in continuous imagined communion with him. At the end of the allotted time, she returns and finds his body. She is then a woman in her sixties; but her husband is, in aspect, still a boy of twenty-one. She has dreamt of him as growing old beside her: she finds him sundered from her by half a century of change. — Even in a bald and ineffective summary the interest of this narrative effect must be apparent. The story scarcely needed to be told as well as Mr. Stimson told it.

We must admit, then, that, from the standpoint of the author as well as from that of the general reader, material may often be regarded as more important than method. But the critic is not therefore justified in stating that style and structure may with impunity be dispensed with. Other things being equal, the books that have lived the

[1] "Mrs. Knollys" is now easily accessible in "The Short Story: Specimens Illustrating Its Development." Edited by Brander Matthews. American Book Company, 1908.

longest are those which have been executed with admirable art. The decline in the fame of Fenimore Cooper is a case in point. Merely in subject-matter, his books are more important now than they were at the time of their original publication; for the conditions of life in the forest primeval must necessarily assume a more especial interest to a world that, in its immediate experience, is rapidly forgetting them. But Cooper wrote very carelessly and very badly; and as we advance to a finer appreciation of the art of fiction, we grow more and more distracted from the contemplation of his message by his preposterous inequalities of craftsmanship.

Novels like the "Leatherstocking Tales" may be most enjoyed (I had almost said appreciated best) by readers with an undeveloped sense of art. This would seem a very strange admission at the close of a study devoted to the art of fiction, were it not for the existence of that other group of stories whose importance lies in method even more than in material. A lesser thing done perfectly is often more significant than a bigger thing done badly. Jane Austen is likely to live longer than George Eliot, because she conveyed her message, less momentous though it were, with a finer and a firmer art. Jane Austen's subjects seem, at the first glance, to be of very small account. From English middle-class society she selects a group of people who are in no regard remarkable, and thereafter concerns herself chiefly with the simple question of who will ultimately marry whom. But by sedulously dwelling on the non-essentials of life, she contrives to remind the reader of its vast essentials. By talking to us skilfully about the many things that do not matter, she suggests to us, inversely and with unobtrusive irony, the few things that really do. Her very message, there-

fore, is immediately dependent upon her faultless art. If she had done her work less well, the result would have been non-significant and wearisome.

Poe and de Maupassant are shining examples of the class of authors who are destined to live by their art alone. Poe, in his short-stories, said nothing of importance to the world; and de Maupassant said many matters which might more decorously have remained untalked of. But the thing they meant to do, they did unfalteringly; and perfect workmanship is in itself a virtue in this world of shoddy compromise and ragged effort. Long after people have ceased to care for battle, murder, and sudden death, the thrill and urge of buoyant adventure, they will re-read the boyish tales of Stevenson for the sake of their swiftness of propulsion and exultant eloquence of style.

And fully to appreciate this class of fiction, some technical knowledge of the art is necessary. Washington Irving's efforts must, to a great extent, be lost on readers who are lacking in the ear for style. He had very little to say, — merely that the Hudson is beautiful, that the greatest sadness upon earth arises from the early death of one we love, that laughter and tears are at their deepest indistinguishable, and that it is very pleasant to sit before the fire of an old baronial hall and remember musingly; but he said this little like a gentleman, — with a charm, a grace, an easy urbanity of demeanor, that set his work forever in the class of what has been well done by good and faithful servants.

There is a very fine pleasure in watching with awareness the doing of things that are done well. Hence, even for the casual reader, it is advisable to study the methods of fiction in order to develop a more refined delight in

reading. It would seem that a detective story, in which the interest is centered mainly in the long withholding of a mystery, would lose its charm for a reader to whom its secret has been once revealed. But the reader with a developed consciousness of method finds an interest evermore renewed in returning again and again to Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue." After his first surprise has been abated, he can enjoy more fully the deftness of the author's art. After he has viewed the play from a stall in the orchestra, he may derive another and a different interest by watching it from the wings. To use a familiar form of words, Jane Austen is the novelist's novelist, Stevenson the writer's writer, Poe the builder's builder; and in order fully to appreciate the work of artists such as these, it is necessary (in Poe's words) to "contemplate it with a kindred art."

But the critic should not therefore be allured into setting method higher than material and overestimating form at the expense of content. The ideal to be striven for in fiction is such an intimate interrelation between the thing said and the way of saying it that neither may be contemplated apart from the other. We are touching now upon a third and smaller group of fiction, which combines the special merits of the two groups already noted. Such a novel as "The Scarlet Letter," such a short-story as "The Brushwood Boy," belong in this third and more extraordinary class. What Hawthorne has to say is searching and profound, and he says it with an equal mastery of structure and of style. "The Scarlet Letter" would be great because of its material alone, even had its author been a bungler; it would be great because of its art alone, even had he been less humanly endowed with understanding. But it is greater as we

know it, in its absolute commingling of the two great merits of important subject and commensurate art.

But in studying "The Scarlet Letter" we are conscious of yet another element of interest, — an interest derived from the personality of the author. The same story told with equal art by some one else would interest us very differently. And now we are touching on still another group of worthy fiction. Many stories endure more because of the personality of the men who wrote them than because of any inherent merit of material or method. Charles Lamb's "Dream-Children; A Revery," which, although it is numbered among the "Essays of Elia," may be regarded as a short-story, is important mainly because of the nature of the man who penned it, — a man who, in an age infected with the fever of growing up, remained at heart a little child, looking upon the memorable world with eyes of wonder.

These, then, are the three merits to be striven for in equal measure by aspirants to the art of fiction: momentous material, masterly method, and important personality. To discover certain truths of human life that are eminently worth the telling, to embody them in imagined facts with a mastery both of structure and of style, and, behind and beyond the work itself, to be all the time a person worthy of being listened to: this is, for the fiction-writer, the ultimate ideal. Seldom, very seldom, have these three contrarious conditions revealed themselves in a single author; seldom, therefore, have works of fiction been created that are absolutely great. It would be difficult for the critic to select off-hand a single novel which may be accepted in all ways as a standard of the highest excellence. But if the term *fiction* be regarded in its broadest significance, it may be considered to include the one

greatest work of art ever fashioned by the mind of man. The "Divine Comedy" is supreme in subject-matter. The facts of its cosmogony have been disproved by modern science, the religion of which it is the monument has fallen into disbelief, the nation and the epoch that it summarizes have been trampled under the progress of the centuries; but in central and inherent truth, in its exposition of the struggle of the beleaguered human soul to win its way to light and life, it remains perennial and new. It is supreme in art. With unfaltering and undejected effort the master-builder upreared in symmetry its century of cantos; with faultless eloquence he translated into song all moods the human heart has ever known. And it is supreme in personality; because in every line of it we feel ourselves in contact with the vastest individual mind that ever yet inhabited the body of a man. We know (to quote the Poet's most appreciative translator) —

> "from what agonies of heart and brain,
> What exultations trampling on despair,
> What tenderness, what tears, what hate of wrong,
> What passionate outcry of a soul in pain,
> Uprose this poem of the earth and air,
> This medieval miracle of song."

His labor kept him lean for twenty years; and many a time he learned how salt his food who fares upon another's bread, — how steep his path who treadeth up and down another's stairs. But Dante saw and conquered, — realizing what he had to do, knowing how to do it, being worthy of his work. Therefore, singly among authors, he deserves the sacred epithet his countrymen apply to him, — divine.

"The Divine Comedy" is the supreme epic of the world. The supreme novel remains to be written. It is doubtful

if human literary art may attain completeness more than once. But as our authors labor to embody truths of human life in arranged imagined facts, they should constantly be guided and inspired by the allurement of the ultimate ideal. The noblest work is evermore accomplished by followers of the gleam. Let us, in parting company, paraphrase the sense of a remark made centuries ago by Sir Philip Sidney, — that model of a scholar and a gentleman: — It is well to shoot our arrows at the moon; for though they may miss their mark, they will yet fly higher than if we had flung them into a bush.

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